

E. L. S. E.



THE SECOND DECADE

“Ecce Homo”



Of the same author, in English language:

The Fight with Yourself. 2012. PublishAmerica: Baltimore, the United States of America.

Identity Sheets. 2013. PublishAmerica: Baltimore, the United States of America.

A Threefold Loneliness. 2014. Coauthors: Horia Ungureanu, Dragoş Ceahoreanu. PublishAmerica: Baltimore, the United States of America.

The Ghost. 2014. America Star Books: Baltimore, the United States of America.

Dew Windows. 2014. Coauthors: Vladimir Belity, Constantin Butunoi, Mihai Comănici. Arad.

Comparison between the English and the Romanian Philokalia. 2015. Arad. (www.academia.edu).

Bible Missing Texts. 2014. (www.academia.edu).

The Unwritten Novel. 2014. Coauthors: Flavian Suărăşan, Dragoş Cheahoreanu. Arad (www.academia.edu)

Note Book One: Comparative Study of the Psalms. 2016. Arad (www.academia.edu)

The Church – Laboratory of Salvation, in the Work of Priest Professor PhD Academician Dumitru Stăniloae, Arad, 2019. (www.academia.edu)

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E. L. S. E.

THE SECOND DELUGE

- “Ecce Homo” -

Octagonal Gnostic Mosaic

**This book has been finished on 28th of May, 2020, on the
Holiday of the Lord's Ascent with the body to heavens.**

Arad, 2020

ISBN 978-973-0-31831-9

Dedicated to

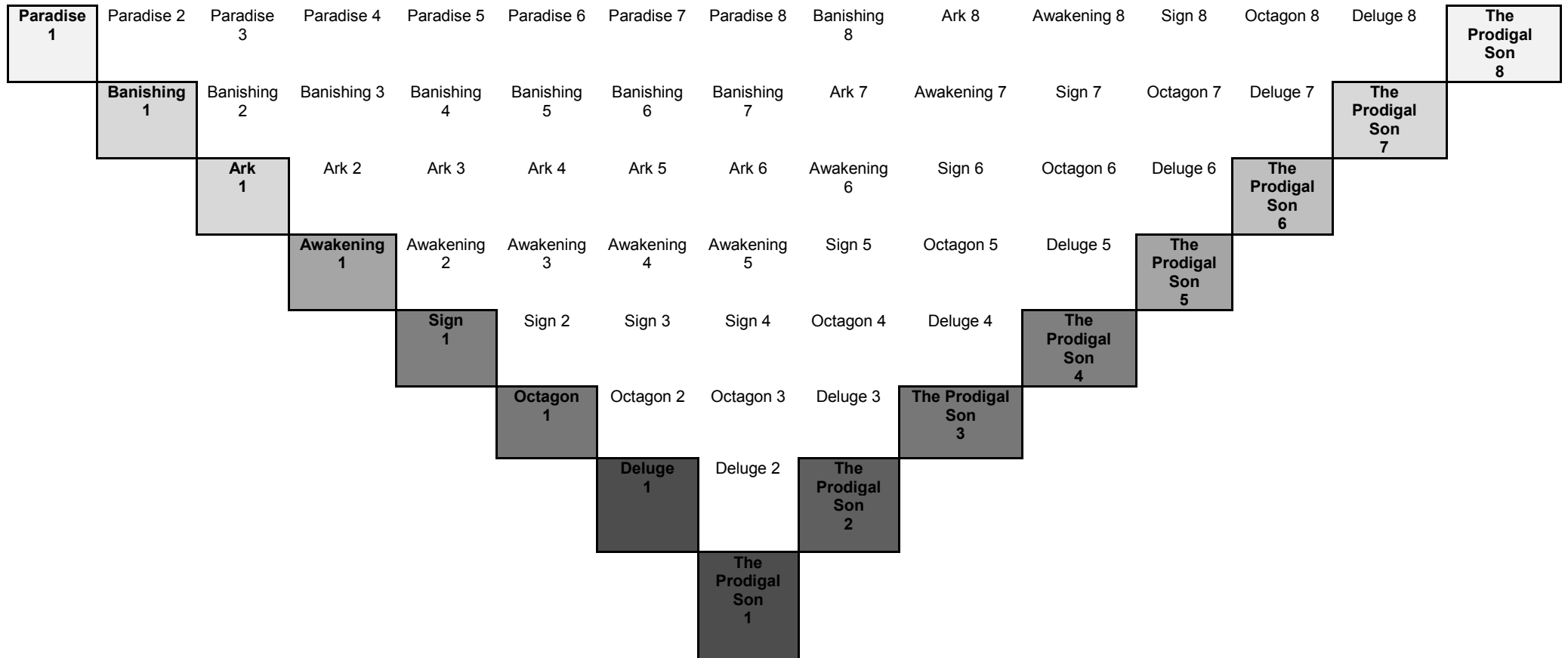
His Holiness

The Most Pious Father Nestor Iovan

From the Holy Monastery of Bodrogul Nou

The Spiral of the Octagonal Flight

(Reading Key)



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Foreword I

“The Second Deluge”, this new book written by E.L.S.E., it stays, obviously, under the sign of the same figure, 8, like the first deluge, the Biblical one, did. I am saying this, for it is known that, in Noah’s ark were saved from drowning, the same number of people: namely eight. Prophet Moses, in one of his books, he tells us why God had to deluge the world, namely to destroy the world by drowning it. Moses explains the fact that God was discontent with His creation (the Man), who filled himself up with sins, who chose to live in sin (as there were the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, where “the sin was shouting out to the sky”), so that God had to proceed to the destruction of His own work. Actually, in both cases, it is about the same thing: about regeneration, about rebirth, about purification through water and fire.

As I said before, this book is “soaked with” the figure eight. It has eight chapters, and each chapter is composed by eight subchapters – titles. It is interesting the fact that the author hasn’t placed (as usually) the chapter one after another, neither the subchapters one after another, in the body of a chapter, but he has ordered all of them in the shape of a spiral (he has called the organization of his text just like “The Spiral of the Octagonal Flight”, in the “Reading Key” he placed as a first piece of the book), being inspired, probably, amongst other things, also by the spiral of the human genome, or, maybe, by the spiraled organization of the matter in universe.

At their turn, the chapters have as suggestive names as one can get: *“Paradise”* (speaking about the serene life from childhood); *“Banishing”* (...from “Paradise”, namely about living the home and entering the sinful world of the grownups; leaving for the military high school – a fact that has marked the whole author’s existence); *“Deluge”* (namely falling down of the self - entering the sin, generated, on one hand, by the unfair

world the character of the book – nameless, en-hypostatic – lives in, and, on the other hand, his helplessness in finding his place and purpose in the new universe he was sent to live in; the falling down, the decaying of the character is manifested, amongst other things, through some sort of alcoholism, practiced without any pleasure, rather like some sort of punishment, like some damnation, like a torment); “*Awakening*” (a chapter in which the book’s character looks with lucid eyes at the society he lives in, beautifully and suggestively hinting towards his grandma who “lived for others”, and, when she no longer had whom to share his kindness, she “dissipated herself to heavens”); “*Sign*” (facts, happenings, letting him understand that somebody watches over his fate, and over everybody’s fate; nothing is a simple coincidence – the author seems to tell us in this chapter); “*Octagon*” (explicitly hinting to figure 8; here reappears, for a short time, “the urban Hermit”, a character the author prefers; this character can be found also in other books of E.L.S.E.); “*Ark*” (namely the salvation of the character, coming from people reaching the holiness state: Petre Țuțea, Father Mihai, Father Nicolae dela Rohia, and from the spiritual guide of the author -, but also from reading texts like *The Paterikon* and *The Romanian Philokalia*); “*The Prodigal Son*” (namely the deliverance, the getting out from sin, from the sin of living a grey a without horizon life, but also from the sin of drunkenness).

In its entirety, “*The Second Deluge*” is the book of “banishment from Paradise” (the childhood’s Paradise), of the sinful life in a sinful world, of fighting for regaining the self, and for finding the road towards salvation. But, in the same time, it very well can be a metaphor. The metaphor of the tyranny, of the way any excessive authority (either of the state or only of one of state’s institution – in the analyzed case being about the school and the military service) it can mutilate the individual’s personality, but it can also be the metaphor of the

human person struggling to overcome this tyranny by preserving his human identity and kindness, namely his last sign of freedom.

Maybe the key of the whole ample demarche of the author it can be summarized in the Latin saying: “Multa ceciderunt, ut altius surgerent”, meaning that many things fall down, namely they descend in derisory, in sin, for being able, later, to be reborn, to be elevated higher. I am saying this, thinking at the fact that the author of the book suffers too, namely he crosses through the same process: falling into the sin (the decaying), followed by the struggle for overcoming the sin, namely for finding again his self.

One more thing: the spiraled evolution of the main character's life it suggests us that there is always another beginning.

Horia Ungureanu
Writer, literary critic

Preface

"The Second Deluge" describes a spiritual trip, a sincere account of the growing up and of the intellectual and spiritual evolution of a military. During this trip the Bible is the "measure of all things". While he was a child, the main character disregarded the Bible, even mocked it, by reckoning the holy teachings as being lies, unworthy to be believed – towards his grandma stupor; she was speechless when hearing such awful words. This happening was to be the beginning of a childhood and of a youth full of humiliations, toils, and mockeries. During the primary secondary school he experiences the forced labor while picking grapes, suffering almost unbearable exploitation. He leaves for the military high school and then for the military school for officers, where, like the prodigal son, he experiences humiliations and injustice, accompanied by hunger and cold. He overcomes all of these with stubbornness, considering them as injustices he didn't deserve. The episode at the graduation of the military school shows that, being successful, it increased his pride. But the pride made the humiliations hurting him even more painful. All of these darkened his mind; he judges everybody, colleagues, commanders, professors... In this bitter state he forgets about living his life, about tasting the charm of youth.

Suddenly, he found himself having a family, with responsibilities, with hardships due to the military regime and rigors. He judges his commander for being an alcoholic, but he himself ends being an alcoholic. During the military mission in Africa, he encountered, again, people who discontent him: "African officers stood apart. Most of them were poorly prepared, but almost all of them were occupying high management positions. There were some of them thinking that they deserve everything".

One day, facing a new beginning, he rediscovered the true Bible, and he heard a voice, telling him: "Voice of God, not

of man". He started attending the Church's religious services, and he searched for spiritual books, and he undertook pilgrimages to monasteries in search for finding a spiritual guide.

Still driven by passions, he wanted to reach the spiritual knowledge as soon as possible, and that's why he directed himself towards mystical or initiatory doctrines, towards yoga, and towards martial arts... but neither of these could bring content in his soul. He still longed for something unclear. He started reading *The Paterikon* and *The Romanian Philokalia*. He was charmed by the reading, though he thought the things he read were impossible to actually live. During his missions in Africa he carries in his heart the longing for God. Encountering the churches from Lalibela, he defines the sign of the Octagon as a "spiritual ark" where the believers find their escape. The righteousness of God comes upon us. The expiation isn't a punishment but a means of getting wiser, a harsher correcting. In time of expiation, when the tribulations and the troubles are allowed to come upon us, if we endure them without speaking against, God will help us to cross over them; if we refuse accepting them and we rebel against them, God let us enduring them by ourselves, and our sufferance increases. The stubborn man sinks deeper, and the betterment becomes impossible. The correction through the tribulations of the life it is longer or shorter, depending of the person's nature. If the soul becomes steadfast in good and work the good deed, the tribulations pass. The troubles God allows to come upon us they have also the role to bring in sight the hidden aspects of our soul, especially the love for the self. The pride is the beginning of the falling. The time of bitterness persists as long as the soul is engulfed in pride.

Finding a spiritual guide, the book's main character started praying. He read the *Oratory of the Mother of the Lord*, fact that brought in his soul a great quietude and joy. The prayer gives birth to an "ark" growing around the soul, which

keeps us above the muddy and killer waters of the sin. He then reached at the faith that he could do anything by the help of God, by ascending the stages of the spiritual climbing as Evagrius Pontius described them: "The virtues are the steps of the active life, ordered in the following sequence: the first one is the faith, that gives birth to the fear of God. This one gives birth to the keeping of the commandments whose daughters are: the restraint, the sapience, the patience, and the hope. All of these lead to dispassion, of whose fruit is the love".

All these things brought him closer to understanding and to feeling the truth the words of the Savior comprise: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart and you will find resting to your souls" (Mt. 11: 29).

The eight virtues are an ark having its eight sides in which the believers find their road towards the consummation of the soul. They are like the spokes of a wheel; when the wheel rotates and moves, its shape is maintained by all the spokes.

Then the main character of the book found a hermit he read the Book of Psalms together with, and from whom he learnt the prayer for enemies: "Lord, turn all my enemies to kindness and prayer!" The done prayer envelops the soul in peace. Nothing is more difficult to obtain, than the quietude. The knowledge brings loneliness. In order to find his way, he read a lot, but all the roads came to an end, and they didn't offer him the liberation he was longing for.

Encountering the three old men at the cabin on the mountain it gave him the occasion to ask them a question that was bothering him for a long time: "I would want to know what I am running towards? What my purpose in life is?"

"The purpose of each human being is to discover God in his heart and to become His servant to death. This purpose one can fulfill by doing small things with patience and hope". This answer pleased him and brings peace to his soul.

The book offers us a short account on the events from December '89, which took place in Romania, as seen through the eyes of a military. We can thus relive the state of confusion of those days. In continuation we can also perceive and understand the unrest the military organism was struggling with, during the two post-revolutionary decades, and we can see the trauma and the sufferance of the military caused by the army's reform.

This book has been written with soul and blunt sincerity – a true confession – and it offers a pleasant reading; we hope it will bring within the soul of the reader inward joyfulness, peace and quietude.

Priest Ioan Lazăr

Motto: “Abdita loca”¹

Paradise 1 – The Astral Travel

“Do you really believe, grandma, the lies of these ones?!... I’ve just read in the “Funny Bible” that they were constantly battling each other and they were killing each other, the more they could...”

The old woman, the grandma of the little boy, remained speechless. In the same room – the front room, the upper room – was present also the boy’s brother, laughing half-heartedly at the daring mixed with unconsciousness his brother so boldly confronted their grandma with.

The massive table the woman was reading the New Testament on, it was surrounded by chairs upholstered with red velour. On the left hand was the Library the father of the little rebel gathered in, an eclectically and imposing collection of books.

The “upper room” was a “fashionable” addition to the house, built by the defiant boy’s grandpa, the husband of the woman stunned with disconcertment, not so much because of the daring of that little atheist, but mostly because of surprise and because of her desire not to vex the little orator.

Granma smiled confusedly. The child looked at her face, framed by the customary scarf, irradiating kindness and understanding, but also an embarrassing feeling not addressed to a certain somebody, but being rather a declaration of exoneration brought before God. She didn’t accuse the little revolutionary, neither justified herself, but she only felt uncomfortable with the words of her grandson, which were contesting the Bible’s truth and holiness.

She didn’t know what was with that “Funny Bible”, but it seemed to her as being something evil, some mockery, something menacing the certitude that led her entire and by no means short life.

The child looked, full of self-importance and enthusiasm, at the face of his grandma, and, shortly after he uttered those words, he had a cloudy feeling of a pricking in

¹ Lat.: “Hidden places”.

the heart: some sort of diluted, unclear shame. The things he read in the “unmatched book of unveilings”, the things he affirmed with such a great confidence, they seemed now flooded by a bitter taste... He felt the same sufferance when, years ago, his mother tried to dishabituate him of suckling from child’s bottle, and, in order to do that, she cut that with a scissors. He got high fever and suffered wrapped in those cold bed linens, which covered that couch, on which, in the following years, two of the family’s members died.

“How can you say something like that, child?!” she finally asked. And this was all she answered him.

In front of the library there was a large window, and on the right hand was one alike. Through the window facing the street, the light was flooding the space of that room and carried from outside the lonely worries of the street and of the ones walking that road, bordered by the majestic colors of the royal roses. Through the other window was gushing in, green and raw, the tender and succulent promise of bringing forth fruits, made by those few rows of vine from the garden.

The event of the fever, caused by the attempt of weaning him, it didn’t cause too much trouble. In this family the ill ones didn’t produce any worry: they suffered, they were provided the help the approximate medical knowledge and the “old wives remedies” required, and they were left to heal by themselves. It is not very clear how such feelings for and perceiving of the sufferance of the ill one could be considered: “He will get better anyway!”, “There/s nothing serious!”, “It’s only flu”... One could feel here a slight intention of avoiding the responsibility of taking actions and the attempt of conserving a certain comfort... Or maybe everything was solved due to a natural confidence in the fact that all things are decided from above...

That fever sunk the little boy in some sort of delirious sleep, during which short periods of calm semi-consciousness were crossed through by nightmares agitating the small creature.

When awake, often at evening hours, he had the strange sensation of being morning, and, his physical and psychic rhythms were perturbed, making him expecting the daylight. But there were coming only the darkness and the torment of

the sleepless hours and some sort of dread that the day won't ever come again.

After a few days, the state of the little patient started improving. One morning he fell in a deep sleep, a very profound one, a regenerator one. He dreamt he was in front of a creature of striking beauty and intelligence, a shining creature, a creature whose entire body was covered in red, mauve, and blue lights.

That creature looked at him with a slight surprise but also with benevolence, with serenity, and with understanding. They said no words to each other, but he felt they communicated so much.

Awakened around noon, the child appeared to be fully restored, and he hastily descended from "the upper room" in the summer kitchen where he surprised his grandma, by appearing as he was, in pajamas and barefoot, as asking her:

"Give me something to eat! Spread a lot of larder on a big piece of bread, and slice a big onion and sprinkle a lot of salt on it!"

He emerged in the springtime sun like a little wild creature, from his winter den, overflowing the energy of the searching for a life's meaning, though for now, it his search started with a failure.

**Motto: “Abstractum est altitudo, super suum concretum
existens, eo quod suaessentia est.”²**

Paradise 2 – Spiders

The children tarried late in the night, playing “hide and seek”, in the street deserted by the darkness’ fall. They were running and hiding in the most unexpected corners.

Were preferred the giant chestnut trees whose leaves with seven “fingers”, by grabbing big chunks of darkness, were wrapping the hidiers, protectively, against the ones who were trying to find them.

Likewise, a few meters from the road there was the little railways bridge, having its own hidden places and that offered the possibility of getting rid of pursuers, by crossing under it and by hiding in the corn fields from both sides of the railway.

On both sides of the road there were deep ditches with tall grass, in which old poplars grew for decades and could be used for hiding in the back of their trunks.

An unreal light was poured by the full moon upon the whole street. It was warm outside, it was summer: it was a fairy tale time. That game seemed to be played by some little savages, lost in a time without history, a time when the myths still weren’t followed by the merciless plow of the reason.

Like fireworks, children’s laughter colored the silver light, making the moon to enjoy and to participate to the game of the little creatures.

Slowly by slowly, the playing army got scattered, until he remained alone. Though, we didn’t want to go to bed. Sitting on the threshold of the summer kitchen he was contemplating the moon that was entangled in the branches of the huge poplar from the front of the house. That tree was there at his birth and he left it there when leaving the places of his childhood.

² Lat.: “The abstract is the highest level situated above its concrete by the fact that it is the concrete’s essence.”

Now the moon seemed like a big nets, a luminous one, built by a fire dove, from yellowish-orangey embers: a living fire, not consuming the branches where it was lit on.

From the animals' yard he heard the chickens twitching and cackling in their sleep, and the piglets fidgeting and grunting while sleeping cuddled close to each other.

The garden from beyond coops was divided in two plans: one above, lighted by moon, and one situated under the canopy of the plum trees, in an impenetrable darkness. As it looked, that garden was a scary realm to the child.

He got up and went in the shed that prolonged the small building of the summer kitchen, where he searched for the big pot in which his grandma boiled corn, on that evening. The moon rays were coming from the left, but they were cut off by the tiles and didn't succeed penetrating the deep darkness of the shed. He wanted to give up, but he was very hungry after so much playing...

By groping in darkness, he finally found the switch and he turned the light on, only to be astonished. The thick beams sustaining the tiles roof were covered in spiders: huge, fat, having the body as big as a plum, and having powerful and hairy legs. They were almost five centimeter in diameter and they were crowding to each other.

In the center of that arachnid invasion there was a totally white spider, the other arachnids seemed to keep a respectful distance from.

Entire this sight evoked the celebration of an absconded rite, whose leader was – he didn't know why he felt it – that immaculate queen...

Quite scared, the child gave up his search and flew in "the upper house", where he hastily slipped under the cold linens and fell asleep like for defending himself against the things he just saw.

Motto: “Natura nihil facit frustra.”³

Banishing 1 – Grapes

Each time the classes started, for the secondary school students, one month later. They had to pick grapes for a whole month and on a daily basis.

They rejoiced twice: first for they escaped classes, and second for they followed to fill their bellies with fruits. But these seemingly good things hid sufferance within.

Buses picked them up in the morning, from the schoolyard and transported them to the foot of an immense vineyard covering the southern side of the hills, towering up above the city.

Rusty rows of vine stretched as far as one could see, streaking the sunny slopes with parallel meandering lines. Amongst leaves they could see the crowded up grapes, almost welded to each other. Raining at the right time was the crucial moment of that year's spring, and in autumn the harvest was a fantastic one. And they, actually children, were called to help the communist regime to cope with the luck it was stricken by.

Also condemned to viticulture, there were the class masters, who were fulfilling the role of guards. At the indications of the technicians or of the engineers, they placed the children at the end of each plot, each one at the beginning of a vine row.

Brought from home, each child had a bucket, a wretched knife, and a little bag with some food, each one according to his family's possibilities, though it was too demanding to use the word “possibilities” in that case, because their school was for poor children, especially for the ones coming from the two colonies of people disadvantaged by fate, existing in that city.

Hungry for fruits, chronically deprived of vitamins, during the first half an hour, all the children gorged with grapes, as they were, sprayed with copper and chalk, and slightly washed up by the poor rains fallen the last few days.

³ Lat.: “Nature doesn't do anything inutile.”

At the shouted out urges of the professors, the children started filling their baskets up with grapes and then carrying them back at the end of the rows, and end becoming increasingly far as they advanced deeper in the heart of the vineyard.

There, at the starting point, were waiting for them the students from the eighth grade, who were distributed some long wooden boxes, like some squashed cylinders, having an open end. This kind of transportation means was called “bot”, and it was provided with two fabric straps used to carry it on one’s back like a rudimentary rucksack. It could contain a few buckets of grapes. After being filled up, the children elevated it with difficulty and put it on their backs and the, wobbling, they crossed the distance to a special trailer, parked way too far, where, a few favored of the fate and of the professors, were emptying the “bot”s and then they were crushing the grapes by stepping on them with their rubber boots, in order to load that trailer with as many a possible grapes.

Everybody had their hands sticky due to the stum that, willy-nilly, covered, after a while, all the things the grapes came in contact with. On the covered with stum hands, of the grapes pickers, adhered dry crumbles of leaves, so that their hand became black. After a few days of work, the skin around everybody’s nails cracked open and become infected and very painful to touch.

Because of eating unwashed grapes, around the mouth and on the cheeks appeared brown, sticky stains. Woe to the ones who stained their clothes while working! And there were only a few to escape that... Their sleeves stuck to their wrists, and their trousers glued to anything they sat on, and also to the skin of their legs, giving them an acute sensation of disgust.

Being a little more robust than others, he was appointed that morning to carry a “bot”. Due to the poor maintenance and to the long use, the planks the “bot” was made of, they were no longer leak proof, so that the juice from the crushed grapes was flowing down on the back of his legs and on his shoes. He tried to avoid that, as much as he could, by walking upright and not leaning forwards, a thing proved to be impossible when climbing up or going down the slopes.

Abundant sweat was flowing down of the children's faces carrying those "bot"s, and seeming like a string of ants in a permanent come-and-go to their anthill.

Those small creatures were being submitted to too much effort; such a labor was too much for them, and the whole thing seemed to be a punishment given to some disobedient slaves.

Driving like some slaves masters, there were the professors forcing the children to such a high pace, for they were entrusted with a norm that had to be fulfilled. Of course that everything was arbitrary, because those small children mustn't even be there. And then, who knew how much a child can carry on a day's work, to establish a quantity to be achieved?... But, being terrorized at their turn by the principal and by other "state organs" present there, the professors were trying to save their own skin.

Sometimes, in a foolish competition, and worthy only of sorrow, the children transporting the "bot"s were running towards the grapes trailer, attempting to count the highest number of transports, in order to be recorded in the class master's notebook with the highest record.

How disappointed they were, at the end of the "agricultural internship", when the representatives of the vineyard came and paid them misery wages and each child received the same amount of money, no matter they were industrious or they were lazy, cheating at work!

During lunch breaks, because the harvesting lasted each day until late in the evening, the first care the children took was to find some source of water where to wash up their sticky hands. Sometimes they found some stinky water in small pond, but, usually, they found nothing. They repeatedly begged their professors, and the vineyard's employs, to bring to the place they worked, at least a cistern of water, even not drinkable... but they spoke to the wind.

Others tried a different approach. They crushed grapes and washed up their hands and faces with the juice they obtained; thus, they succeeded to remove the crumbled leaves and the accumulated mud, but, after the juice dried, it was difficult to them to detach their fingers from each other because they were glued. So, as the last resort, they spit on

their hands and, when moist, they rubbed their hand against the grass that survived in the not dug places from the vineyard.

All these things were necessary in order to be able to eat and also in order to spare the scarce drinkable water the lucky one had in some one liter bottle.

Drinking grapes juice they produced in their buckets, it was only a momentary solution - because the high content of sugar the grapes had, and the chemicals the grapes were sprayed with - and then the thirst came back even bigger.

In the food bags of the “a little well off children”, there were jars with vegetable stew. Others, had even a so-called sandwich, formed of two slices of bread, one of them having some plum jam, or jam made of other cheap fruits the poor people could afford. A piece of cheese or a pepper, it was a true feast.

And those children were working all day long, by doing super-human efforts!

Leaving the vineyard, some children tried to avoid the “filters” - the guards – who, at their turn, tried to impede the children to take some grape for home. The first ones crawled under the vine rows and tried to exit further, carrying with them few, by now half crushed, grapes. Those fruits followed to be enjoyed by their hungry families, by their brothers and sisters, deprived, for too long, of eating grapes...

When the evening came, the buses took them and after reaching the school, they abandoned the children. From there, each child was on his own. No protection, no care, not even a thought at how they managed their way home.

Next day the ordeal repeated, beginning with the same carelessness, insensitive to the pain of those children, to their hunger, to their thirst, and to their sticky hands with wounded fingers and painfully infected, which maliciously kept sticking to each other.

Motto: “Cognoscibilia cognitionem gignunt, non cognitione gignitur.”⁴

Paradise 3 – Barbel

Little waves shivered the face of the water - of Târnava Mică River - blown by that little breeze, that, after finishing the horsing around through the long grass from the banks, it was rushing across the fresh air from above the river bed. Above the water course that formed the river, there was another river, of cold and fresh air, flowing between the actual river and the trees' canopy.

Here and there, hunted by some predator, or simply playing, little fish were jumping in the airy world from above - then falling back with a slight splash.

Hemp sheave were placed along the banks, hiding amongst their green, or already yellowed by maceration leaves, fish which were half sleeping because the alkaloids extracted by the water.

On the right bank, women and men were weeding the plantation of sugar beet. The scorching sun made them moving with difficulty, suffocating them with its burning rays. They were wearing straw hats and they had their bodies covered with clothing in order to protect themselves against that merciless sun.

From time to time they looked at the children bathing in the shallow and warm waters the river had in that area. How much they wanted to be given a pause in order to refresh themselves in those clear waters! Actually, not the time was what they lacked, but rather the courage to be so childish that, even if seen by the other adults, to sink under those waters. They lost that clean daring to be children any longer...

He was laying down at the edge of the hemp sheave, in that shallow and warmed by the sun water, watching how the very small fish were coming close to him and they were picking him by the toes, so delicately, that he wasn't even feel it. It

⁴ Lat.: “The things possible to be known they give birth to the knowledge, and not they are the ones born by knowing.”

seemed to him that that touch of the small fish wasn't, by any means, real.

At the smallest shiver of him, those so beautifully shining fish, iridescent because of the sun and the water, were jumping away and swimming like some arrowheads splitting the fabric of a dream. Then they were coming back, like they had already forgotten about the danger from before.

The slight current of the water was producing tiny swirls around his heels, carrying the sand down water. No thought was there, with to disturb his quietude. His soul was one with the creation...

He got up and, watching the shoals of the tiny fish, he went up the river, until he reached under a willow, that was shadowing an area with still, greenish water, deep to his chest.

In that eye of mysterious water, he felt an undefined presence, like an energy tremor. Then he saw that a fishing thread was tied on that willow's stem, cutting the face of the water, back and forth, agitated.

He got closer and on a given moment, from the deep of the water came at surface the white head of a big fish, having reddish mustaches, impeded from fleeing away by that hook that pricked his mandible.

For the first time his soul was overwhelmed by a feeling gushing out from the timeless instinct of the hunter. A senses' excitement and an attention's focusing which he had never experienced before, made him approaching tiptoes, with his chest inundate by the sensation of the power given by the fact that that fish had no escape and he could catch it.

Stalking in stillness, when the fish came again at surface, he grabbed it with both his hands. It wasn't a premeditated movement. He simply acted by instinct.

He plucked the hook off and got the fish out of water, on the sandy river bank. Then he saw again, in the shallow water next to the river bank, those tiny fish shoals and, not knowing why, he felt that catching that fish wasn't so satisfactory any longer, and his deed seemed not to be such a nice deed.

He could take that fish at home and show it to his grandma, but, suddenly, he no longer wanted to do that.

There was mud at the very edge of the water and that offered him the perfect pretext to get out of the dilemma he was

in. Maybe he slipped, or maybe he intentionally let that fish go, shining its white belly and its beautifully red colored wings, in that fly towards water... The fact was the barbel turned back to its world, from which, temporarily, it was plucked off..

He looked backwards, for a little while, like for understanding what happened, and then climbed the bank and got lost in that field of sunflower, taller than he was, and in that shady underworld, formed on beneath the round heads of the plants, which shielded him against the burning sun, he was running towards home.

Motto: “Ne puero gladium.”⁵

Banishing 2 – Military High School

“Where’s Mucky?, he asked, because his dog didn’t welcomed him at the gate, by jumping on him, joyfully, covering his uniform in dust with that too enthusiastic paws...

“I have found him dead, on the bank of the canal. Might have been poisoned by somebody...”

He changed his clothes in a hurry and ran to the mentioned place.

Mucky, his beloved dog, died a few hours ago, and now was there, with his mouth covered in white foam. His glassy and lifeless eyes were pointing forwards, in a menacing manner, like towards his killer.

He didn’t bury his dog. It seemed inutile to him. Mucky was no longer but a decomposing body. In the same time, it seemed to him that, by burying his dog, he would have stolen its final hypothetical freedom. Left upon earth, that corpse flowed, anyway, in plants, in flies, and in all those creatures following to devour it.

So, he looked at his dog for the last time and then he detached himself from the last cords which were keeping him connected to the nature.

Since then, he never walked the tall grass from that canal bank, where he was playing, yore, with his dog. Since then, that area was the imaginary playing ground where his dog continued playing, waiting for his return...

Reached home he hid himself in the upper room and he turned the music on, up to the maximum volume, and he cried a lot... He was becoming increasingly aware of the fact that he was not crying only for Mucky’s death, but also because he understood that, once Mucky was gone, the last path towards his childhood was closed up.

After a while he soothed up. He thought at the situation he was in. He graduated the military high school, he sat the exams for being accepted at the military medical faculty, and

⁵ Lat.: “Do not give sword to a child.”; “It is dangerous to let the dangerous things at hand to the ones who lack discernment.”

he was waiting for the result. In the eventuality that he missed the exams with a minimum B then he was automatically accepted to the military school for officers, at the specialty called military chemistry, later baptized NBRC.

He started thinking at the things happened since he was accepted to the military high school. Rapidly, all kind of images were flying before his eyes. He felt a bitter-sweet fondness. He felt again like he was banished away from paradise.

Exam

“What? You! Do you have the bayonet in your back pocket and you are crying?

Tears were flowing down on the face of his good friend, despite his friend’s assertiveness not to give satisfaction to that hooligan - a student of that industrial high school, were the candidates for the military high school were accommodated during the exams period – that tried to crush that candidate’s toes, by stepping savagely on his foot. They were astonished, him and the other candidates, by not understanding the motif of that act. With the years passing, they were to face, on a daily basis that hatred mixed with admiration the inhabitants of the City – especially the adolescents – had for them...

... a “City” that was to be present in the complex, suave or brutal, emotional, chocking and menacing significations it established, related to them - the students of the military high school -, like it was a Person. The City was to become a brutal beast, offering you short moments of freedom; in its bosom they fell in love, they knew the glory and the satisfactions their grey eminences achieved, and they were aggressed and beaten with brutality.

His future colleague was crying not so much because of the pain he felt, but rather because of the helplessness he felt regarding to pay back, for that hobo was surrounded by his gang...

That incident was quickly forgotten, because the next day started the medical examination and the sports exams. A crowd of “children” of fourteen years old, were driven, naked,

through the medical cabinets, and then they put on the sports suits and went to the sports facility where they gave their best.

There followed the written exams. On that plateau, in their first square formation ever, the accepted future students stood having the feeling of being little heroes.

Recalling those moment he had the sensation that everything was predestination, for the event flowed so quickly and surprisingly, and so precisely, than he couldn't be, by any means, about a prepared, analyzed, decided long time ago, decision of his. The straining, the effort of will, the emotions, the stress, all of these triggered some kind of defense reaction from his unconscious, and that reaction left everything on the active side of the individual, in a process resembling to the living in a dream and slipping amongst that dream's meanders.

It seemed that the fate offered to the accepted students their so-called first victory. Then it followed the Military High School!

Contact with the Reality

After exams, they received a written order, specifying the date and the hour, at which they followed to present themselves at the High School.

During his last days of freedom he was constantly calculating the time he was to leave. He identified the trains (though he lived at less than one hundred kilometers from the City where the Military High School was, it took three trains to reach there) and – at least so he thought – he was preparing himself for the High School.

He left home in that beautiful and sunny autumnal morning. His beloved fields and hills from the Târnava Mică Valley, were passing at the train's window, disappearing behind, together with the moments of his beautiful and careless childhood, spent in the hazelnut and oak forests, spent in the orchards abundant in fruits and hiding places. He felt himself pricked in his heart by a sentiment of getting out from the natural order of the things; the sensation he had was that of an undefined danger, like a bad foreboding.

After arrival, right from the first moments, they were told the basic things they needed.

“Mother, I need a wristwatch, so many notebooks, a fountain pen... because, look, they ask us to have these things!

His mother ran to the City, in order to buy him the requested things, and he felt himself, for the first time, really alone.

Actually, his mother was suffering more than he did, for, the mature you become the more refined ways of suffering you develop. He wasn't her first child leaving home, because the other son she had was conscript in the mandatory military service at the time, but that one, at least, he had the perspective of being demobilized after doing his time. She received this son's decision to left for the Military High School in tears. He announced her in a pause he had between classes, when he ran to her office she had nearby, and he told her that he wanted to throw himself headfirst in a reality he knew nothing about. His school was visited by a second lieutenant, who brought a book with pictures about the Military High School, and the principal gathered all the boys from the eighth grade in a classroom, for a short presentation of the “advantages” the military schools were offering.

They say about conscious decisions, well analyzed and weighed decisions... In his case was about destiny! When he saw those pictures with that parading military formation, he instantly knew that he was already committed to the army.

“But you are learning quite well, ugly you aren't, so you don't need to hide behind a uniform... You better become a physician!”- vainly tried his Romanian language teacher to determine him to change his mind...

After putting on the blue uniforms, they were shown to their parents: “Behold why we have made out of them...” And, having their hearts divided between pain and pride (those days the army represented something you were taught to be pride of...), their parents were sent home, leaving them, the fresh students, by now the fresh orphans, in the care of their new stepmother: the Army.

It followed to be put in formations, on groups, depending on how tall they were. This operation was carried out by captain “Crisis”. They were trying hard to find their

places, to pay attention to what the infantry officer was telling them to do...

Suddenly, at his left ear, an animal shouting burst out, as a loud explosion of the irrational. Words were uttered like a crushing down, without pauses between; he didn't even understand those words for the first time. His brains were blocked by that unnecessary and unjustified violence he wasn't yet accustomed to, and he wasn't able to process those words in order to understand them:

"Go back, you mother fucker!"

After arranging them on platoons and gathering those platoons in a company whose commander was captain "Crisis" and having as administrator of company's inventory a caricature of petty officer, it followed a period of physical training in order to accumulate the basic military movements and specific phrases. Amongst other things they were told that each time they see a superior- being that even a student from an older year of study - they must shout out, the loudest they could: "Attention!" During the first few days they had, as an absolute master, a student-corporal. One of their colleagues received the visit of his father - an army colonel - even if that day wasn't a visit day. When that colonel entered the dormitory where his son was, the other students didn't pay him too much attention, for they didn't know the importance of his military rank - that colonel was only the father of their colleague, namely a parent, despite the fact he was wearing a military uniform. After a while, all of the students from that dormitory shouted out the magic word "Attention!" so loud than even the Colonel jumped on his feet, by reflex. It happened that the student-corporal entered the room...

First day of training meant four hours of "parading", keeping their hands behind, moving on a square's sides, under the supervision of the student-corporal appointed to each platoon and under the watchful eyes of the captain "Crisis".

Then there came other and other days of training, cold, hunger, and torment, in such a number that he lost the count of. He was no longer noticing the passing of those days. They seemed the same and normal to him. The abnormal became to him as "normal" as one can get.

One cannot say the habituation to the High School life was too difficult to him. He had to do what he was ordered to, and that was it. He was ordered to gather leaves, he gathered. He was ordered to train for parading, he trained. Slowly, bit by bit, the High School, the army, set dominion upon you, they became one with you. They were modifying your thoughts, and your sense of humor, in parallel with the development of your capacity for defend yourself. This capacity to fend for yourself was referring not only to your physical capacity, but as well to your psychic capacity. You were getting capable to endure increasingly more and increasingly worse.

His awakening to reality, his getting out of cocoon, his birth like man, took place in High School, starting with that curse. Then he understood that everyone experiences his on slice of reality, through his own personality, having its own acquaintances, his own events, his own sufferings and joy: all of these as personal as one can get!

Professors

Extraordinary! Famous! Special! About each one should be written a book, for each one's life would fill up an entire tome and it would even spill over: they were the authorities of the City on education and pedagogical art.

School days always started with singing the national anthem, and when the first classes were on mathematics, he felt he choked and he wasn't able to sing. So, he only mimed.

Mathematics Professor was one with her discipline! On one occasion she confessed her passion for mathematics: "Are you talking about being tired?! I take medicines in order to be able to sleep and to stop thinking at mathematics..."

In the first moments each time she entered the classroom – like a tornado! –, she threw the heap of books with mathematics exercise on the desk, and then she jumped of that freshly polished with wax podium.

"Grab a piece of paper!"

It usually followed twenty minutes of dictation of math exercises and then a half an hour remained for solving those exercises. There was not time for thinking too much. You had

to write according to automatisms already formed and crystallized by previously solving hundreds of exercise.

Proof for the level she trained taught them mathematics is the fact that, after six years from graduating the High School, he took the textbooks and review his skills and, without any help, he sat the exams and was accepted by University of Timisoara, on a time when the competition, due to the small number of students the universities could accept. Not to say that he was considered, amongst his colleagues, one of the poorly prepared in mathematics...

He understood for his mathematics professor what means: the effort of will, the rigor, the prolonged training. That teacher couldn't stand stupidity; she also had a tough way of relating with her students, never to show her feelings... but she felt for strongly for her students.

She was a force of nature. After three days from having an appendicitis surgery, she was already there, in the front of the class, because there it followed their exam for promoting in the second half of the High School. She was there, teaching, despite the pain she was in, and without overlooking anything.

She had also something special: she was breeding mathematician geniuses: she discovered them, she took them under her protection, she polished them and pushed them beyond their limits, and then she launched them in their life flight. In her tough way, beyond any sentimentalism, she loved them as they would have been her children; she, the Mathematics Teacher, was giving them birth again, from the meeting of the soul with the mathematics, out of the fire of the pure science transmitted through her mediation, from beyond, from transcendent, to her students from the "mathematics cabinet".

Master of the class was their physics professor. She had a special way of being; and of communicating. He couldn't forget her astonishment mixed with some fear, when, in a very hot summer day, thirty too student out of thirty five the XIth B class had, they cut their hair and shaved they heads, in a sole afternoon.

She asked them the next day:

"Are you some sort of sectarians?!"

Actually, the same question was asked during the “fashion” of the martial arts, when, after the trainings totally chaotic and lacking any real foundation, which took place secretly, on evening, on the High Scholl hallways, half of them got injured. And again when there occurred the fashions of the “plucked of epaulettes” or of the “torn shirt sleeves”.

The role of the master of the class had it was a very limited one. The ones in charge with punishing, with rewarding, with the soul’s problems, with the daily life of the students: were the Commanders.

Another professor he was much indebted to, was the professor of psychology and pedagogy. She had long nails, like some kind of wings deeply cutting the ineffable, in the attempt of scattering away their bewilderments; she wielded those nails like some swords in front of the eyes of the colleagues sitting on the first benches. Some of them shunned themselves, ironically, and she, the “psychologist”, made fun of that.

“If I can’t understand you either, then who will do it?”

Together, the whole Romanian and foreign literature, much delicacy and a little coquetry and femininity: the literature teacher. Her classes were transporting her students on the realm of the imagination, and the characters from diverse writings became alive, touching, and they were embodying themselves around you. You were talking to and suffering together with Eminescu, and Eugen Jebeleanu, your bench mate, was reciting to you the Hiroshima’s Smile.

Evening individual study was mandatory, taking place like the classes did, with pauses of ten minutes after each fifty minutes of study, with the compulsoriness of keeping quiet, with the interdiction of leaving your bench even for helping some colleague in doing his homework. Teachers were scheduled to be present and to offer their help, whoever asked for it. Related to this, a funny episode took place: the deputy principal, the second position in hierarchy after the military commander, he asked his colleagues, during a meeting, to prolong the time they stay in the afternoon; a young professor of art’s history, newly arrived and not “militarized” yet, answered that request: “Mister principal, I don’t want to upset you, but in the afternoon I have at home, amongst other things, some sexual activities to do!”

All the present ones burst in laughter and, in that ironic but intelligent way, the exaggerated proposal of the deputy principal was rejected.

Colleagues

Getting close to his colleagues meant getting far from his family. In the same time with entering the adolescence and starting to become aware of his own person, the student moved with his entire universe in the High School, amongst his colleagues. Eating, sleeping, living next to somebody, for four years, enduring his small miseries, trembling with cold, starving, and being tormented together with somebody, twenty four hours of twenty four hours, fighting and punching each other, then being forced to live with that guy and to reconcile with him, tolerating him and then becoming best friends, it doesn't mean anything else but to be brothers. Or comrade, and sometimes this institution of comradeship meant more than brotherhood.

“Coagulating the formation” it is a military expression naming the transcending of a group of individuals in a supra-human whole – the platoon – an entity influenced by each of its composing individuals... but which, at its turn, it limits the individual freedom. If the platoon does something wrong, you cannot keep yourself apart, or - God forbid that! – to tell something to your commanders! The punishment of the whistleblowers was a dire one.

Based on pure speculations, fueled up by some coincidences, as also by the own type of personality, you could be beaten through the procedure called “putting the blanket on the head”.

“He surely is a whistleblower! That's why he was appointed as help at chancellery!”

“You are right, because our stupid company commander had no way of knowing from somebody else!”

“Let's put the blanket on his head!”

“Be prepared for tonight, at eleven p.m., but keep it secret from him!”

On the decides hour, out of the two dormitories the platoon was occupying, others than the room their target was sleeping together in with other eleven colleagues, the executioners started flowing, carrying with them pieces of wood, rods of iron detached from their beds, broomsticks, or even with the bare hands.

The signal was given and one student pulled the blanket the victim was covered with, on his head, and hits and kicks started raining down on the unfortunate, maybe for twenty seconds. Then everybody ran and hid in his own bed, as nothing would have happened.

“Have you slept well?” – A colleagues ironically asked the victim, next morning.

“Well...” – answered the questioned one...

But his answer wasn't too far from truth! Crowded around his bed, the executioners actually hit and kicked each other, causing more damages to themselves than to their target. Nails falling, head bumps, bruises... Whom they beat, if not on themselves?!...

Continuous arguing and mockery were taking place, misunderstandings related to cleaning sectors – those portions of the High School internal or external surfaces, appointed to one or more students, which he must keep them in an exaggerated state of cleanness -, or related to the daily duties and services but, only rarely these misunderstandings were solved by physically fighting. Though, such fights took place...

“You, Tractor, what a flat face of track do you have!”

“Get lost, you Horse, let me alone!”

“You, little Tractor!”

Suddenly, with the veins of his neck swollen and panting with nervousness, the one nicknamed “Tractor” came close to the one nicknamed “Horse”, with his fists tight and with his eyes staring in fury. Horse met him with a cute and ironical smile, pretending to be bewildered, and mimicking a total serenity. And he had nothing to fear of, because of the obvious difference in caliber: height, physical power, big hand like shovels, weight... But didn't matter... Tractor already cast the dice, and he stood trembling with fury in front of his giant opponent... The end of the fight seemed to be quite predictable...

After a while, Horse, intrigued by the defiant attitude of Tractor, but still not being prepared for really beating him and wanting to avoid the confrontation, pushed him back, but Tractor didn't renounce. Then, still undecided, Horse launched a torpedo, with his giant fist, right in the nose of Tractor. That punch devastated the "windscreen" of the Tractor, but was, though, a little undecided. Then, in a fraction of a second, Tractor threw himself, head first, and grabbed Horse's legs, in a rugby tackling movement, and he brought his adversary down, in the cheering of the class. The other students, satisfied by now with the show they watched, stopped the fight by separating the two gladiators. A few more minutes of reciprocal cursing and a few more days of avoiding each other, and then the two reconciled and everything went back to normal.

Modest, but recognized and respected by the Platoon as a wonder of the Creation, there was living amongst them a genius. He went to primary school when he was five, because his parents no longer could stop him. Ending all high school years with the overall average A, passing the baccalaureate with A, he was brilliant on all disciplines, from sports to mathematics. His fantastic memory and his unmatched power of understanding mathematics were supra-natural. He was able to read in the pause before the next class a few pages and, when asked, he reproduced them by heart, unlike the usual students who, learning the whole yesterday afternoon, they could only approximately reproduce.

Towards the end of the fourth year, while preparing intensively for sitting the exams at the Technical Military Academy, he was learning the whole night, but he never missed a class. Actually, the Mathematics Professor got for him the privilege of benefiting a one and a half more hours of sleep during the mandatory study program. He entered the Academy on the third position and graduated it on the first position, and then he was appointed to a poorly paid academic job, as university assistant, and after the Romanian Revolution he resigned and took a job where he was granted three times the monthly salary he had before. And that tells a lot about the way the Army treated and protected its valuable assets...

It was tough job learning in the afternoon. In a class of thirty five students, despite all restrictions, despite the fact

that usually disobedience was punished with physical torture – like huge number of genuflections, like being ordered for countless times to lay down to ground and get up – the noise finally broke out, especially when the officers on duty missed, and especially at the students from the third and fourth years. If, neigh to you, your colleagues spoke to each other about their latest love affairs or about the newly watched movie, it will be very difficult to you to learn about *drosophila melanogaster* – “the drunkard little fly” – or about hrydrocarbons. Add to this the unrest characteristic to the age they had and to their lack of maturity.

By no means could one say they didn’t want to learn! It seems incredible but they escaped their dormitories during night and flew for class rooms, undertaking the risky attempt to “steal” even one more hour of learning... Maybe they were so adamant just because they were forbidden to do it... They tried to keep stealth and in order to do that they were preparing their classrooms like for bombing alarm, blinding they windows with curtains, they locked up the classroom door, and then they kept a voluntary silence. When caught of being “outside program”, the punishments varied according to the one who caught them.

“Shush!... Somebody is trying to open the door!”

Moments of tension, suspense, and grave silence...

“It’s ok now! Whosoever was, he left! I am going to smoke a cigarette. Come and lock up the door after me!”

Then, surprise!: the company commander, a fresh graduate from military school, rushed in.

“Finally!... I have caught you all! Why aren’t you in bed at this hour?!...”

“We have been trying to study...”

“Shut up! I know better! You are trying to fool me! Run and wait for me at the end of the company’s hall! Towards the company, running, go!”

Desperate, without having enough space to pass through that door, crowding on each other in the attempt not to be the last one, they flee to the company dormitories and waited there, aligned in the place they were told to. After long and tormenting minutes, the commander finally appeared and they shouted out, all together: “Attention!” He passed by them

smiling wickedly, and he let them stay there and went to his office. After letting them boiling a little more, he tried to put on a dreadful face – a thing he wasn't able to do, because he had strabismus and the effect was contrary to the intention, his face being now a caricature making you laughing – and announced them their punishment.

“Start doing genuflections, at your counting, until I will remember you!...”

They started doing those movements under the watchful eye of their executioner, having of his face a smile of an almighty tyrant; he savored any sweat drop, any trembling, any panting, and, finally, the falling in their knees of the ones punished for their desire to study a little in order to sit their exams for promoting in the last two years of High School. When they reached around three hundred and eighty genuflections, he sent them to bed, very disconcerted by the fact that one of them resisted so much...

Full of compassion their colleagues helped them to climb their beds, for, though they weren't punished, they suffered together, watching their ordeal through the open doors – a thing the commander pretended not to observe, but he actually savored it, also because he thought that that made the punishment more efficient, because thus he made all of them to suffer.

That company commander tried everything in order to craft for himself a legend of cruel, feared by crowd, executioner...

Can you believe that his cruel methods were directed against some fifteen-sixteen years old children?!...

Between greenhorns and veterans the relations weren't too nice. The colleagues from the third and fourth years of study made a glory title for themselves, out of inventing the most diabolic and the most humiliating methods of tormenting the students from the first and second years. A general belief was that the greenhorns must see “what the military means”, and therefore they were forced, for instance, to pay respect not only to the person of the student-sergeant, or to the person of the student-corporal, but even their pieces of military equipment.

A kick in the ass, administrated harshly, or a slap on the neck, they urgently “would bring you to reality”, if you passed on the sidewalk and you didn’t notice the hat of the student-sergeant, that was resting, by its self, on the bench you passed by.

“You, greenhorn, do not pretend you haven’t seen my hat!... get back and salute it! It’s not your business that its owner isn’t wearing it...”

One of the “extra-curricular” activities the students of the first year assiduously participated was the cleaning up of the “sectors” appointed to the students from the third and fourth years, especially during the night before leaving for vacations; and not only then... If comrade sergeant was illegally missing because he got late in the City, where he was drinking, he had to recuperate the time he lost. In such cases he usually came accompanied by one or two of his colleagues, as “muscles”, and picked up a few helps from the dormitories of the first or second years of study. The dormitory’s door was usually blown open by a kick, and then, the student-sergeant entered, wobbling, and barely pronouncing the words, and full of a fury he wanted to be authoritative, shouted out: “Attention!” At that command the greenhorns jumps off their bed and stood still.

“I need to voluntaries! You and you! Come after me! March on!”

It was impossible to refuse. You could try, but it was useless! - Because, in addition to the lost sleep you could get a beating too. And then you became their favorite target any time they felt the disposition to torture somebody. In such cases the nickname used for designate the unfortunate was: “professional volunteer”.

He witnessed once an attempt of one of his colleagues to refuse that forced labor. That colleague just arrived from another “job” of the same nature and he was truly tired and sleepy. That giant of sergeant-student went directly to him for punishing him because the slowness he stood up.

“You, come with me!”

That colleague answered:

“By no means!”

They immediately heard a low slapping and their rebel colleague fell by his bed. After a few moments, he stood up again, having his face bathed in tears.

“Are you coming now?”

“Yes, I do...”

Actually, this young rebel has more of this kind of deviations”. Being in the second year of studies, a student of the third year – after graduating the military school, during an alpinism training, that man died, unfortunately, in an climbing accident – throw a piece of bread in his face. He reacted by cursing him and throwing, at its turn a, a piece of bread at that student. This gesture offended all the students of the third year and they waited for him, chased him like hunters chase a prey, and they hit him and kick him all this time, until he sought refuge in the deputy officer’s in duty room. The third year of study counted around two hundred students. The deputy office on duty was a student of fourth year. He asked the victim to leave.

“Do you want me to be beaten too?!”

As a wounded lion he tried, with his last energy, to seek refuge in his dormitory, and he went down the stairs under a rain of blows. He fell down on the stairs, almost unconscious. His salvation was two students of the third year, two judoka, who probably realized the danger the victim was in. Their decision of saving him it saved also the perpetrators – in case the victim died, they would be sentenced for murder – but it also offered them a motif to cease they vengeance.

Carried by his fellow colleagues in his dormitory, the poor guy hadn’t even the power to cry.

A special place in the landscape of the “insanities” taking place in the High School, it was held by the amusements the students from the final years of study, the “veterans”, put on stage, by using student from the first two years of study as lab rats – the so called “volunteers”.

“On the wardrobe, go!”

The space between the top of the wardrobe and the ceiling had approximately one meter and twenty centimeters.

“Stand up! Do you refuse a direct order?! Stand up, or else!...”

Their young backbones were desperately trying to find a way to push that ceiling up, or to press the wardrobe down, striving to execute the order they received, according to regulations.

"This evening we have a musical show. Take those brooms, imagine that they are guitars, and, at my command, sing the national anthem. You, the ones from inside wardrobe, pay attention to me! You are the lights play! You are green, you are red, you are blue, and you are yellow... This is also the order you "light up". Follow the music, open the door of the wardrobe, and announce the color!"

And thus, on the music sung by the "musical band" from upon the wardrobe, the ones mimicking the "lights play", they were opening the doors at each one's turn and were announcing the color they were appointed to, trying to not fall behind the rhythm.

It happened, in the same evening, to take place an inspection undertook by the military commander of the High School. He, unexpectedly, summoned all the company commanders by not communicating them the motif, and, accompanied by the officer on duty, they visited all the dormitories. That action took everybody by surprise. Especially the student appointed that day command that company in the absence of the officers. That student tried to save the situation, by announcing the perpetrators, and he shouted out as low as he could, his report:

"Attention! Comrade Colonel, the Second company executes evening activities. In the sector of the company are two hundred and fifteen students..."

Towards the perpetrators' despair but also for the later laughter of the assistance, the commander entered just the dormitory where the "greenhorns" were performing that show. Previously, in the attempt to fool the control posse, they were forced, all of them, to enter the wardrobe and menaced to keep their silence, or else!...

But the visit included also the verification of how the equipment was arranged in the wardrobes. So, the commander himself opened the first door, and a first student appeared.

"Get out of there! What have you been doing in there?!"

The same action and the same result were repeated for a few times, and then, the commander ordered:

“Get out, all of you!”

Twelve greenhorn students were staying aligned before the wardrobes, feeling avenged and surely relieved from the humiliation they were being submitted to.

The “greenhorns” savored any moment of despair, any drop of fear of punishment, the “veterans” manifested; the former executioners and tormentors were reduced to the state of little lambs staying on the verge of a precipice, imploring to be pushed over the edge, in order to vanish from the face of the earth and thus to escape the situation they were in.

Finishing the first year of study, one night before leaving for summer vacation, he participated to something a little more special. After he cleaned up a urinal by scratching the yellow deposits with a razor blade, after he washed up a portion of the hall – not entirely, because all the greenhorns were assigned to a few tasks, probably in order to suffer all of them -, and after a few “lay down” and some “crawling”, one of the students of the third year came with the idea of offering him a few “relaxation moments”. So, he was invited to play some poker – mind that it was four o’clock in the morning. Resistance was futile, so he “gladly accepted” and also took heed to lose all the games in order not to upset his superior.

A strange character, or maybe only a little more stranger than they were, one of the “difficult” cases, started to manifest when they were in the second year of study. The evening counting was in progress – a solemn moment, when everybody keeps his silence and stands without doing any movement – and that student laid down on the ground, holding his head with his right hand, totally relaxed, like he was on the sunny beach...

Not wondering about anything – after seeing so many crazy things – but fearing the punishments they could suffer, his colleagues asked him what his problem was. He answered them, in a total state of calmness:

“I have dwarfs on my brains!”

He was admitted to infirmary, where, proving a worthy to be admired perseverance, during the two weeks he stood there, he procured the chemicals necessary to fabricate

fireworks. Then he produced a few “grenades” he “attacked”, one night, the company commander with.

It was already dark, around ten o'clock. At that hour everybody were in beds, not being allowed to go anywhere, and having all the lights turned off. But, after the first explosion, in a few seconds, all of them were at the windows, watching the “war” and cheering after each explosion.

Each firework went off with a loud bang accompanied with beautiful red-blue flames.

Their company commander at that time, after being attacked, he crossed the plateau in running, closely followed by the so-called “grenades” the student “with dwarfs on his brains” was throwing at him, by laughing and having so much fun. The officer sought shelter behind a pillar and drew his pistol out, trying to see where the attack was coming from. But in that deep darkness, only the laughter of the attacker was heard, and, due to the echo bouncing on the walls of the High School – its buildings form a square around the plateau – it was impossible to indentify where the attack was coming from. The battle came to an end because the ammunition finished.

An inquiry followed next morning. The attacker was indentified and his little explosives factory was found. But he was forgiven: because he was under treatment!...

That wasn't the sole “armed attack” they witnessed in the first year. One of the students from the second year of study escaped for the City with the complicity of the armed sentinel, probably by giving him a few cigarettes. The escapee came later than planned, and the sentinel he bribed was replaced from duty. The new sentinel – also drunk - refused to let the student pass, so they carried out unsuccessful negotiations for a while. Then, desperate because the “evening counting” was approaching and already all the students were gathered on the plateau, he jumped over the fence, punched the sentinel in the face and ran towards the gathered formation. Being drunk and not realizing what he was doing, the sentinel fired his submachine gun at the runaway. An armed concrete pillar stood between the fired bullet and an awful tragedy. Everybody was shocked by that event. Later on, for some time, the sentinels were appointed on duty without carrying ammunition. Such a bullet could cross through

several innocent bystanders. But God helped them and stopped that murderous bullet!

The runaway student, shocked, kept repeating: "Hide me, please! He shot at me!" Of course that student became their hero!

Next morning, the counterintelligence officer, together with the commander, with other officers, came with the sentinel and asked him to identify the runaway student. When passing before students, the sentinel – who was a conscript of the regular military service, service that was mandatory at that time – could hear the threats the students uttered him:

"You are going to die!"

"We'll show you!"

There were almost a thousand students hating him and he knew that things could go ugly... he was scared and pretended not to recognize the runaway student. He kept saying: "I'm not sure, I cannot remember, it was dark..." If identified, the runaway student would risk expulsion from High School and the eventuality of being forced to pay all the education fees, for in the case of the military students everything was paid by the state. After a while the inquiry commission ceased searching and there took place a cover up.

At the end of the first year of study, the chief of their class – every class had a chief who also commanded the platoon, for each class was organized in a platoon with three groups – appeared carrying a heap of almost disintegrated notebooks covers, seeming some scrolls from the Dead Sea. The rule in that High School was that all the notebooks and the books to be wrapped up in blue paper covers, in order to be everything uniform. Even the labels must be glued at the same distance – measured in millimeters – from the edge. Together with that junk, the "present" included also a couple of flower pots wearing some withered traces of former flowers.

"They asked me for this sum o money..." said the chief of class.

So, not having any chance do to otherwise, they collected the requested sum of money and paid it to the bully.

"You will do the same when finishing the fourth year! So you will be paid back then!" said the initiator of the 'present', who was also the recipient of the 'protection fee'.

Their feverish adolescent life included also macabre preoccupations, sometimes aberrant; all of them probably due to the bravado. One of the colleagues didn't find anything better to do, one evening, than to jump over the fence of the morgue – on the right hand of the High School was the county hospital, including a morgue. He came back having a pale face, vomiting, and trembling. It seemed to him that a cadaver moved...

The same colleague, during a French language class, when the professor turned towards the blackboard, he tried to stay on his head on the classroom floor, next to the bench where he usually sat – this happened in the third year of study, when there were only a few weeks until vacation came. Everything would have been ok, but, in his effort to do that very quickly, he pushed too hard and rotated and fell on his back. At the teacher's question he answered:

"I've just fallen off my bench..."

The teacher replied:

"Please take him to be seen by a doctor, because "he seems not to be totally sane..."

Some professors were constantly targeted by students, based on the professors' habits. In one case the students noticed that their teacher uses to lean against the terracotta heating stove and, consequently, they rubbed that tiles with colored chalk – woe to the blue deux pieces wonderful suit of the victim! In another case, the chalk was replaced for a resembling piece of cheese. After she touched that "chalk", the professor, in tears, exited the class room.

Periodically, when the servicing group was changed, at the dining hall, the students must plunder plates, bowls, spoons, and forks, from ones from others, because during their service, for a week, all the dishes were appointed to their personal inventory. Usually other servicing teams stole in advance because everybody knew there were to be losses. In case they lacked parts of that inventory, they were forced to pay for it. The sums weren't so small and the punishment wasn't too light. So, before handing over the inventory to the next team of unfortunate, an ad hoc commando was formed. Their bad luck was that, that night was officer on duty the chief of the military music, otherwise a quite nice captain, and

the music room was situated just upon the dinner hall. The commando stole what they needed and they were leaving the crime scene with the loot, when the captain got them and arrested them. They were introduced “for safe keeping” in the prison⁶ cells the sentinels guard had in its building.

Everybody knew the saying: “In the army no one steals, but he only completes his losses!” And it truly was like that! Nobody took anything out of the dining hall, but there still were losses. In time, the “completing” techniques evolved, some of them being hinted even by commanders, who were also held responsible for the losses. You could, for instance, simply go and eat with the others and after finishing your meal, you could left with having the spoon or the knife or the fork in your pocket; also, you could unscrew the upper board of the cupboard and, after taking what you needed, to mount that board back, as nothing would have happened, for the seal and the padlock would have remained intact.

The thieves’ commando wasn’t punished to heavily, but, at the noon counting, they were tied bowls around their necks and they were marched around the plateau, forced to shout out loud: “Who does like me, let him have it like I had it!”

Jokes and horsing around were usual things. The High School was a “cosmopolitan crowd”. One night they took a colleague, with his bed too, at the end of the company’s hall and let his sleeping there. In that morning he woke up and it took him a long while until he realized why he was there in his bed, watched by the sentry...

Sometimes joking went wrong. Two of his colleagues, they escaped the mandatory evening study, and they went to the dormitory and started eating bread, onion, and lard. Having any food on the dormitory was totally forbidden but the insufficient quantity and quality of the food they received at dining hall made them hiding some reserves they asked from home. These secret stashes of food were hidden in the personal wardrobe: in boots, in the sack with sport gear, under the bed

⁶ According to the military discipline regulation of that time, any officer, depending on his rank, he could throw without any process, in the so called “arrest” (actually jail time), any subordinate, at his will. The arrest period was three, five, nine and even twelve days and nights.

mattress – wherever they thought nobody would find it. They were begging for bread at the dinner hall and sometimes, when there was a merciful cook, they got some.

So, these two colleagues were eating bread, larder, and onion. One of them having nothing better to do, he made some jokes related to the other one's girlfriend. In a bravado attitude, counting on the fact that the joker will run away, the "offended" one raised the knife he was eating with and, after the joker left the room, he threw the knife after him. But, the tragedy was, that the runner showed his head in, and the knife hit him in the neck, behind his ear, in the jugular area. He was instantly covered in blood, and fell on his knees. The few students who where there, they picked him up, pressed a towel on his neck and rushed him, on their arms, to the nearby hospital.

The team of medics quickly assembled in order to save him. The first doctor requested the operation theater to be prepared. The second one said that there was nothing serious, and the victim needs only a few stitches. The fourth one said that that was but a small cut and only two stitches were needed. And the four one concluded that only a bandage was necessary, for the wound was only superficial.

And thus, by an extraordinary luck, because that knife had a round and blunt tip, the victim appeared back, triumphantly wearing his bandage, being immediately surrounded by colleagues and telling again and again the story of what happened, and how glorious he was when arriving at the emergency room with that knife stuck in his neck, and how the doctors evolved from being so scared to laughing.

Commanders

"Say it, you are a toad-eater, aren't you? Yes you are, all of you are!..."

He was just appointed to the cleaning sector situated at the main gate of the High School. The Commander, having nothing better to do in that morning, he arrived earlier and considered it was his duty to unveil his profession of faith regarding the human quality of the students, to him, who just

happened to be there, picking up the fallen leaves with that caricature of almost perished broom.

“Comrade Colonel, yes, we are!” answered him, in an upright position.

“Bravo!... See?... You, wicked!...”

Maybe the Commander tried to throw some joke at him, speaking with a low voice, almost whispering, with a mimicked aggressiveness. Like always, the Commander had his brown leather gloves on his hands, and his uniform seemed to be perfect, like new; only his hat was placed a little tilted towards the right, according to the inter wars period.

He didn't seem to belong to the High School. He was rather detached from the reality the students – the larvae, the wicked – lived in, during their unimportant and worthless life. Perhaps out of comfortableness, maybe out of some cowardice, though he found out many bad things about tortures his officers applied to the students, he preferred to turn a blind eye and a daft ear to them. After all, it was good for discipline, wasn't it?

All he wanted was to become a general! Rumors were that he ordered twice his general uniform and he was postponed each time, because of his bad luck. The first time, a student was locked up, by mistake, in the dining hall, and that one didn't find anything better to do but trying to jump from the second floor on a platform that was above the entrance from the first floor, but he missed the landing and fell, and he fractured his skull. The second time, a soldier arrived from his leave, drunk and upset for he found his wife in bed with another man. He attacked a sentinel and disarmed him and then shot himself twice above the main heart artery, in an attempt to commit suicide. He was saved, ultimately, but discharged from the army with second grade disablement.

Commander's bad luck pursued him also when the High School was to be visited by a high commissions from diverse upper levels. One day, after he waited for five hours for the minister of defense, with the guard of honor, he ran to his office, for some reason, with the intention to immediately come back. During those five minutes he lacked, the ministry appeared and the Commander wasn't there to salute him. On another occasion, during the visit the Commander of the

Infantry and Tanks Headquarters, the whole High School looked like brand new, shining with cleanness. The students worked in the days before like slaves, say and night, in order to clean and polish every corner. During that cleaning period all classes were suspended. Wearing the ceremony uniform, in white shirts, the students were grounded in their classrooms and, having nothing to do, being forced to not even speak to each other, being also exhausted because of so much working and deprived of sleep, after a while, they all feel asleep. A system to warn the students was in place, but the High Commission didn't follow the itinerary they were recommended, so, when the Commission entered their class room, they were sleeping profoundly. The general knocked with his fingers in the desk. Some sleepy heads popped up, bewildered, and then were followed by increasingly many. A timid: "Attention!", a very weak one, was uttered like for himself by Horse, who slept with his head of that desk and now, seemingly dreaming, he was trying to put his uniform in order...

"What's this, you, ox?! Send immediately these children to dormitories and let them sleep! What do you keep them here for?"

Those words were addressed by a lieutenant general to a colonel, and the last one was trembling with fear, not even noticing the offence – maybe he didn't even understand what the general said him – being terrified by the fact the comrade general got upset with him.

Not all the general visiting the High School – for the High School was "protocol unity" and it was often visited by diverse commission or delegations – were equally tough. On an occasion the platoon was coming from the sports facility, led by the chief of class, and it followed to walk between a lieutenant general and the commander of the High School and, the chief of class, for in his mind the biggest personality was the commander of the High School, he ordered the platoon to parade and to present the salute to that one, and not to the general, who was higher in the hierarchy. But the general didn't care, and he replied:

"Let them alone, can't you see that they are only a bunch of children?!"

From the height of his imposing stature and from the level of his important hierarchical position, that general tried to excuse that unimportant platoon in front of the High School Commander.

Their first direct commander, the company commander – at that time there weren't officers commanding the students' platoons, but only a sole officer managing the command of the company and a noncommissioned officer with administrative attributions – was captain "Crisis"; an infantry officer. Sometimes that captain was quite funny in his bursting out. He usually shouted out his lungs and, for he mimicked the state of angry for so long, it became a habit of his to have constantly wrath crisis. All sort of legends circulated about him, as for instance that his fiancée broke up with him because, when he was at her place, his favorite football team lost a game and he shattered the TV set. Another legend said on him that, when a noncommissioned officer cursed him about his mother he punched that man in the face and knocked him out. At that time, his behavior gave him an aura of nonconformist. Another feat characterizing him was the fact that, each time he didn't find his noncommissioned officer he broke the door of the office that one worked in, and he ordered him, when appearing, to take that door to the joinery in order to be repaired.

He had an absurd and dangerous habit of throwing at you whenever he had at hand, especially with the ashtray from his desk, and then he forced you to buy him another one, in case that ashtray broke. When a new officer was appointed to be his deputy, he sadistically used to crush that officer's plane scale replicas, that officer assembled with so much care and effort and placed them in his office to make that room cozier. That officer finally asked to be relieved from that position and moved to another company, because he could no longer stand the constant mockery and offenses coming from captain "Crisis".

That officer taught them a very important surviving thing. Because the students weren't allowed to wear anything else but the equipment they were given, and because they actually were constantly living in cold, he told them to place

under the coat they worn sheets of newspaper, for thus insulate very well and keep warm.

Mimicked violence “Crisis” constantly manifested was always efficient. So was in that case also, when the students were preparing for a forty eight hours leave, on the occasion of the “International Work’s Day”. In their dormitories, the students were clothing up in the parade uniform – the only uniform they were usually allowed to wear, when leaving the High School – and, suddenly, they start hearing some dreadful snorting, like those of a dying man. They rushed out from the rooms to see what was happening. A burlesque and in the same time awful sight was there to be seen: captain “Crisis” was standing at the end of the company’s hall, chocking the student on duty on that day, by strangling him with his left hand, while crushing him, in the same time, by pushing against him the shelf for boots that was there. When “Crisis” saw them, he let go the poor guy, who fell on his knees, and “Crisis” started shouting out his lungs:

“Mother fuckers, what are you doing here at this hour? Why aren’t you in your classrooms? To the classrooms, running, go! Don’t you hear me? Go! March on! Be gone!”

During all this time when he was shouting out his furious commands, he was randomly punching and kicking whoever came in his way.

As they were, half naked, the students ran to the classrooms, some of them wearing only those “parachutes” – namely that type of classic military underpants, too large and too misfit to be a called a piece of clothing – some of them without wearing a shirt, and they were crowding themselves and being embarrassed because of the teachers who were just coming to the classes.

The same “Crisis” was the one who determined them to destroy the beautiful cabbage plantation of the High School. It was summer, it was the period the admittance exams were sat by the candidates, and the leadership of the High School made the decision to send all the students to the sports facility, in order to not hinder the exams. The students sat there, by their own, forgotten by everybody. When the lunch time came, the hunger kicked in, and, after hesitating for a while - because they didn’t have any command and without a clear command

you were taught not to do anything – they started moving towards the plateau with the gastric juices already consuming their young stomachs. A crowd formed by almost a thousand students was walking that alley, on the sides of which there was a plantation of cabbage. Suddenly “Crisis” got in front of them – he was, on that, day the officer on duty on the entire High School - and he drew out his pistol and having one of his customary accesses of fury, he was wielding that pistol and mimicking that he was to shoot at them.

That alley become too narrow for that massive crowd that started running back to the sports facility, the students from the back pressing on the ones from the front and, some of them started running through the cabbage plantation, trampling it – like a revenge – and pretending not to hear the desperate commands of captain “Crisis” shouting at them to stop...

Captain “Crisis” imagined he was adulated, or loved, by the students he was commanding, but, in reality, he was only tolerated in a very particular way...

Sometimes, when they had classes of military education, they left the High School’s premises for the Hermitage area or for the Crying Valley. The last name was given to a deep valley, which was abundantly sprayed upon with the sweat of the generations of students were tormented there.

Once they arrived at the Crying Valley, the hours of torture followed, accompanied by the relentless repeating of the commands and of cruelly mocking questions like these:

“Do you love me?”

“Do you really love me?”

Then, one day, the “great commander” “Crisis” announced them he was about to leave for the Military Academy in order to follow advanced studies. He was leaving behind a love child, conceived with one of the High School’s cook ladies, and also an aura of a man who was actually still an adolescent, immature, violent, and aberrant.

At the command of their company was appointed a successor, one lieutenant, not a graduate of a military high school, but who was a simple worker before being graduating the officers’ military school. He came directly after graduation

having no experience in working with people, not to mention about any ability of educating high school students. That officer was the worst kind of a human being, having his rationality totally replaced for a sort of low grade cunningness.

He, the student, nicknamed that officer as “Tirpitz”. Because that man had strabismus – not to mention about, again, that that type of medical condition didn’t allow anyone to be accepted to any kind of military school! –, and he was trying to adopt a constantly frown look in order to hide that, but he only succeeded in accentuating even more the expression of confusion and bewilderment he had.

That officer belonged to what was at that time called “healthy worker element”, namely he was a worker before being an officer. That type of candidates, when sitting the exams for being accepted to the military schools, or even at the Military Academy, they were almost always accepted, for they had their own places they applied for, and no matter what results they obtained at exams, they were accepted regardless. This was the politics of the communist party for impeding “the apparition of the elitism in the army” and for “preserving the connection of the army with the people”. It was like saying that the army was something different from the people, and the people was composed from illiterates, and from bumpkins.

And, the students of the Military High School, they were really an elite. They were the best students of the officers’ military schools, or of the technical Military Academy. All that they had to learn were aspects related to the strict specialty they were studying there, because their military education was well accomplished... and for being so adept, they were receiving a pay seven times smaller than the “workers healthy elements” did.

They met Tirpitz with total rejection. Actually, that individual was causing a rejection reaction from the first words or gestures he was doing. But he knew how to break their resistance, because, in his cunningness, he knew that a group can oppose but the individual fears.

The rain just stopped, and left behind, on the plateau, small water ponds. On the back of the company’s formation could be heard loud commentaries, addressed to Tirpitz. And this one, wanting to restore the order, commanded:

“Down, everybody lay down!”

Nobody moved. The rebellion started.

“Platoon number one, down!”

Nothing happened.

“Group one from platoon one, down!”

Again, nothing happened.

“First student from the first group from the first platoon, get down!”

The weak ring, the individual, pulled out from the Platoon’s protection, removed from the movements, from the breathing, from the resistance of the multi-human entity, he caved in and executed the command, for the threat was now personal and the personal punishments are harder to be endured than the collective ones. And there also appears an ugly side of the survival instinct: why am I to suffer alone?!...

And the breaking of the company in individuals continued until late in night. When the individual were brought to submission, there followed the groups, then the platoons, and then the whole company. After being broken in its composing parts, the company was put together again, this time by the will of its new master.

Since then, a terror regime was put in place, from the very next day; Tirpitz remained with that fear of not experiencing again disobedience from students, so he kept them constantly in that state of a tired boxer not letting them time to get rest and to fight back. He dreadfully feared what the Great Petre Țuțea said once: “When the tyrant is refused the trust of the people, he steps in the void”.

Tirpitz prolonged the company’s daily assemblies for hours, so that the students, hungry and tired from classes or from sports, tired also by the fifteen round ran around the plateau – it was a physical punishment Tirpitz introduced it, in order to totally breaking their resistance – some students fainted and crushed their faced on the asphalt. Nobody was allowed to help them until Tirpitz deigned and allowed his colleagues to carry that child to infirmary.

They were in the second year of study, and they were to face the most difficult exam for being admitted to follow the last two years of the High School. Nothing else they wanted more but to be allowed to study, because out of the seven platoons

they started with, only five were to remain continue the High School. Almost seventy students were to be kicked out and were to face an unknown destiny. But Tirpitz, in his constant preoccupation to find out other ways of tormenting them – and maybe because he never understood what learning means... -, he refused them this “privilege”, in addition to physically and mentally exhausting them.

Tirpitz kept them up in the night in order to perform relentless and useless by now, cleaning up; he even introduced the rule for polishing everything with a chemical solution, so that every item and every place must shine like glass. On one occasion, before the High School’s Commander visited the company, Tirpitz forbade the students using the toilets, for two days. Such a punishment was unknown even to the torturers from the communist political extermination prisons. Those children went for physical necessities on the sports facility, behind the High School’s buildings, of even in places like the staircase.

In the same year two, under the “pleasant” command of Tirpitz, they worked in the agriculture for ripping turnips and corn, at one of the Communist Party’s ranch. Surprisingly, that ranch seemed not to have any workers, only a few car drivers and the bosses. The students were the only workers there.

Tirpitz stood on the roof of a dumper truck, like a pharaoh, and the students were all around the four trucks, like some ants. Tirpitz had, stuck in his mouth, a two tones whistle. At the first sound, the students must bend down and grab a turnip, and the second sound, they must throw it up in the truck. The trucks didn’t stop but they were going slowly, with approximately three or four kilometers per hour. The whistling frequency was approximately thirty a minute, so that at each two seconds a student must throw a turnip in that dumper.

One more way to break the resistance of the students was that of making them running on a football field. Tirpitz arranged them on a single file, and ordered them to run forwards. After they reach quite far, he ordered them to run back. The first to arrive, namely the last ones when running forwards, he let them rest; but, randomly, at his will, he could select also the last ones when running forwards, and punish

them with many stadium rounds. This made all of them feel insecure, for their salvation wasn't related to what they were doing, but only to the arbitrary will of Tirpitz.

Tirpitz's menaces were like:

"I am going to make you walking with your livers in your hands, by leaning yourselves against the walls!" or,

"I am going to make robots out of you!"

And he wasn't joking, because, for instance, when queuing for meal in the lunch hall, a simple head turning or a word you whispered to the colleague next to you, or if you detached your right hand from the upper pipe of the balustrade, it brought you as punishment the order to cross over, back and forth, that balustrade, until the place you had in the queue it reached the shelves with food.

Tirpitz's intelligence though, wasn't so high. During the speech he held at one company's assembly, he stood before the square and summoned at him one student, in order to offend them before the entire formation. He said then:

"You have in front of you a criminal, a miserable, and a stupid!"

Everybody burst in laughter, for that amusement was stronger than fear. Of course that affirmation meant to them a characterization Tirpitz made to himself!... But he didn't realize, or, he pretended not to.

Retrospectively thinking, not the physical and the mental efforts the students were submitted at, were the worst, but the manner of offending the human person, and the attempt of transforming everybody in the image and in the likeness Tirpitz had, namely a beast wearing a human face.

Here some questions arise: where were the ones who led the destiny of the High School? Didn't they know what was happening to those children? How was possible that they didn't know? Or, if they knew about the abuses, about the tortures, why didn't they stop that insanity? Did they agree that practices, did they feel comfortable by knowing that there is "discipline"? and if yes, what could one say about their lack of humanity?

It must be highlighted here the fact that the High School had a counterespionage officer, and a network of

insiders was in place amongst students. That network included at least one student from under the command of Tirpitz.

It is useless to say that everybody knew about the abuses, the torments, and the tortures. And this is because everything happened in plain sight! In the daylight, and in the night darkness!

After years, now being officer, on the occasion of a big military exercise, saw Tirpitz there. His first reaction was fury and the desire to avenge on that one. But he looked at Tirpitz more attentively, and suddenly a mercy mixed with disgust engulfed him. That one was now a human failure, a man defeated by life, wearing a dirty and worn out uniform, a fat man, having some sort of disgusting reddish rash on his face. While he was already a second lieutenant, and chief of the NBRC protection, Tirpitz was, after so many years, still only a captain, occupying an unimportant clerk position at a reserve regiment. Finally, the army established Tirpitz's real non-existing value, but it granted him an undeserved mercy by letting him having a job, in one of the cozy folds this institution sometimes had...

In order to be objective, it must be recognized the fact that Tirpitz wasn't physically violent, namely he didn't ever hit or kick the students, as so many other officers did. Some other officer used to call the student in his office, he turned the music loud – in order the crying of the victim not to be heard – and then he beat that student until fainting. There was a provision in the Military Discipline Regulation of that time that mentioned: "discipline must be restored and preserved by any means".

On one morning, in the third year of study, the student on duty wasn't awakened by the sentry, who fell asleep. By an extraordinary coincidence, the speakers of the internal radio communications didn't function too. Consequently, their slippers, which usually were being used to hit the speakers in the attempt to silence them, didn't fly that morning.

He felt an excruciating pain in his skull and jumped on his feet. Then he saw hovering upon beds and half asleep student bodies, trampling on heads, on torsos, on hands – whenever he ended to – a creature from the Andersen's fairy

tales. A gnome, wielding a tentative of a suitcase over their heads, he was imparting blows and kicks in every direction he.

That one was the commander of the company of the third years of study. What actually happened? According to the program, starting at six and fifty, the High School's fanfare was singing on the plateau and the students were expected to be there running in circle around the plateau, until the music stopped, a kind of activity called "warming up". On that day the so called gymnastics was supervised by a professor called, due to his rough and uncivilized behavior, the Shepherd. And they didn't get out for partaking that! After getting tired of beating the student, the magnificent gnome rushed in his office wherefrom he took his "magic wand", namely a rod of a half of meter, made out of bakelite - an almost indestructible material. When somebody was hit with that, a sharp and burning pain engulfed almost the whole body of the victim.

Taking advantage on the fact that the students were still sleepy and they didn't succeed to quickly put on their clothes and their boots, the gnome rushed at the entrance of the company's hall where he waited for each and every of them to pass, and when they were passing he hit them hard and cruelly with that rod.

Can you imagine now, that those days, to be beaten seemed it normal to the students?...

Everything reached a peak when, on the occasion when some of the students escaped for the City with the intention to celebrate the graduation, after they received the results they got at baccalaureate exam. Those students went to celebrate their success with their girlfriends, or with their parents, or only by themselves, who knows?... or even for singing, as the custom was then, Gaudeamus, to their professors... It must be specified here that, being sapient people, they asked for permission to leave the High School that evening, even though, actually, the High School no longer had mastery upon them. But the Highs School resisted their desire of freedom, once more, by refusing them that leave. The struggle between the High School and the City, for having grip upon the students, it manifested once more.

At their arrival, the "fugitives" were waiter for, late in night, with the access doors locked up, by the two bullies: the

atomic gnome and his deputy, thirsty for blood, and quite drunk. They aligned the arriving students of the company hall and hit them with a broomstick, until the students fell down. To one of the students, a hard blow caused him a double fracture of his arm, in the conditions the physical exams for being admitted to the officers military schools were to take place two weeks later.

The students manifested their resistance against whom they could. Before Tirpitz, for a short period of time, the commander of the company was a second lieutenant, who was an intellectual and a superior spirit. For some reason he rebuked them, on the occasion of one noon company assembly, and the students, wanting to show their stubbornness, after entering the lunch hall, they left without eating, like doing some hunger strike. It is also true that those macaronis were almost not edible, lacking any taste and seasoned rather with clear water...

Poor commander!... He remained standing on the empty plateau, looking down, shamed, disappointed... He didn't understand, what these kids wanted? Where was him wrong? He stood there for almost an hour, even after started raining. Not moving. Suffering. A monument of the misunderstanding and of the sorrow... After a while he left, and his place was taken by Tirpitz... How much were they regretting, later, those gruesome cheese macaroni...

Students' young and quickly growing up bodies, they needed vitamins, fruits, vegetables! He, the student, didn't see before that day, the "Day of the Green Salad", such a tempest, such a fight in order to grab as much as "grass" one could. For what else is the salad than some "grass"?!... One on top of another, maybe in a rush determined by the supra-individual conscience of the herd, everybody, not minding about anything else, rushed towards that large box where, seemingly, was a heap of some green gold.

"Do you want to graze?! I'll give you some grazing!... I'll be shepherding you!... To the sports facility, go! Run!"

A tempest of boots, scared faces, hidden discontent...

"Everybody, get down on your bellies! Behold the dandelions! – it was springtime... "Crawling ahead, march on! Go! Take! You graze now!..."

That gnome restored the order! He didn't think, even for a moment, why those children acted like savages for a handful of green salad... But, do you see, the High School didn't tolerate any allusion regarding the miserable conditions of living it provided!

Sectors

The High School wanted, firstly, to be clean!!!....

It didn't offered enough food to its slaves it called students, it was only mimicking the providing of heating during winter, it dressed them up with old and worn and almost torn apart clothes, but it demanded, in exchange, to be unnaturally clean!...

Each trace of moisture on the tiles, each fly egg on a window, each speck of dust everywhere, they must be cleaned.

That episode of forbidding the use of the toilets for two days didn't appear from nowhere. The terrain was prepared by the mania of carrying the cleaning beyond normal, fact encouraged by the classification of the High School like Army's protocol unit.

Each beginning of a new year of study it meant they were asked for money – and not so little as one could think – for arranging and adorning the company's sector of building, and, of course, for doing the same to the classrooms. It is to be mentioned here that the leaving students, they usually almost totally emptied the places they were living in.

Then, by using the terror or by encouraging an artificially nourished competition between platoons, the students were forced to buy cleaning materials. Can you believe that those days, when the communist country lived in awful poverty, the High School didn't provide anything for cleaning, not even a minimum necessary amount of anything? And in those conditions the students were forced to buy polishing material brought through contraband from Bulgaria and Serbia?

Toilets became luxury areas, gradually losing their initial purpose they were built for, and they became intangible areas, guarded by harsh sentinels – the students appointed to

clean them up. The washstands, some places which included two dozens of sinks, they must be ready for inspection a half an hour after the morning or the evening personal hygiene programs ended. They must be even dry, despite the fact that nobody minded to repair the leaking taps. They must be polished and made shiny. The mirrors must be also wiped up, so that to be removed any humidity, even though, due to their oldness, those mirrors were barely usable because the reflective layer from their backs was almost totally exfoliated.

He, the student, had the responsibility of cleaning the showers room. His duties were: to polish the mosaic from the floor, to wipe up any drop of water from the tens of square meters of tiles from the walls, and, of course, to wipe any condensed water on the ceiling. Periodically, on the painted sides the paint had to be refreshed.

But he didn't complain. The worst life had the students appointed to exterior sectors of cleaning. In the autumn, the High School couldn't stand any fallen leaf, any withered grass blade, or any fallen flowers petal. Early morning, the "dromedaries" – namely students carrying on their backs tarpaulins filled up with the mentioned materials – started their caravans, back and forth to the sports facility. And this activity was a continual one, until the former adornment of the trees remained only a memory, until the gloomy skies were descending directly within the students' souls, no longer being impeded by any barricade of leaves, which to cushion its crashing down.

Then the snow came - together with the students despair. Those ones, wearing wet boot, which were no longer dry until springtime, with benumbed finger and toes, they became small stubborn bulldozes, pushing the snow with the little benches they took from their dormitory, benches used for placing the uniform during the night. Sometimes they were undertaking a Sisyphean labor, because, even during the time they were trying to remove that snow, it was snowing, and that white matter, those merciless frozen water crystals kept inundating the exterior surfaces of the high School.

Of course, the interior spaces had, mandatorily, to be adorned with flowers pots! But, especially during winter, due to the cold – the High School command ordered the second layer

of windows to be placed, doubling the existing one, and then totally stopped providing any heat in the classrooms, and the dormitories were being heated only for a few hours during the night – those unfortunate plants constantly withered. The commanders, in order to fix that, made use of that stupid formula, actually a consecrated formula not only in the army but in the whole body of the society: “Manage yourself!” That meant stealing flowers, during night, from the staircases of the civilian apartment’s blocks, from the City. Such expeditionary corps, performing that type of stealing, they were appreciated by their commanders – they did a good thing to the company, and now they could be proud of having the most beautiful flowers in the whole High School!

There was also the whitewashing! That labor wouldn’t have been so difficult to fulfill, if they had had at least a dedicated tool or something. But they were using some almost disintegrated shoe polishing brushes, but not being allowed to do any poor work, because the line must be straight and the curbs must be correctly painted, without staining the adjacent areas.

Most craved for were the cleaning sectors at the classrooms. It was possible to quickly finish your work there, and then to study a little meanwhile. In the evening you could go there, on the pretext you are going to do some cleaning, and then, on one hand, you were able to steal an hour of more study, and then to watch the TV program.

Though very controlled and censored by the communist party, though there was only one TV channel to watch, the students weren’t allowed to watch TV. The situation was similar also in the case of the radio. Nobody was allowed to possess any radio, and if caught, the radio was confiscated and destroyed and the perpetrator was harshly punished.

Escaping for City

Patiently, the City was waiting for them, at the gates and at the fences of the High School. But, the High School fiercely, jealously disputed any leave of some student for the City. The High School was actually a prison. There was no

leave granted during weekdays, except for the ones benefiting of high support from their parents or relatives, and for the ones who gave bribe. On Saturdays there were only rare and restrictive leave. And even if the consecrated day for leave was Sunday, sometimes, due to unknown reasons, the leave was suspended even then.

What could we say about leaving for home for a longer period? Weren't the vacations enough? After any vacation, because you just came from home, any leave was excluded during the first month; likewise, during the last month of the quarter, because you are about to go home; between those, there was only one month, so, weren't you able to resist the longing for home not even for a lousy month?...

During the third and fourth years of study, when their young souls were set of fire by the first teenager love stories, the desire and the pressure of escaping the claws of the High School, even just for a couple of hours, were tremendous. They risked punishment; despite this, they kept escaping over the High School's tall fences, deceiving the sentinels, or having their complicity, by paying their freedom with money, drink, cigarettes, or food. In fact, they escaped the jealous suffocating hug the High School was keeping them in.

There were long used paths, which provided the escapee some safety. Using those paths, the chances of being caught were slim. But you never knew what was about to happen, and to some students, this incertitude increased the pleasure and the excitement the few moments of freedom provided them with.

"What did you flee in the City for, student-corporal?"

"I didn't run, I walked, commander sir!"

Of course, this type of answer meant the student had his relatives in high military or party positions, and he afforded being slightly cheeky.

It was improper saying: "to escape for the City". There it was also another customary formula: "to jump over the fence". The last one illustrated a cruel truth. The High School isolated you from the City by using tall, almost impenetrable fences, made out of concrete slabs, almost two meters high. You couldn't see over them, and this increased your impression of being isolated and locked up.

During the fourth year of study, he, the student, leaving for a workshop that was to be held at the Military High School from Cămpulung Moldovenesc, he realized that the reality couldn't have been more different. That High School, of a typically Moldavian kindness and bonhomie, HAD NO FENCES!!!!.... It was surrendered only by the common sense of everybody and by the distance of a few kilometers to the City. In exchange, around that High School there was a huge and all-comprising openness, walked within by the ones who loved nature – students, professors, and officers -, climbing the mountains from behind the High School, having their high grass slopes descending just to the place where the High School ended, or to the place of the small river's meadow that was guarded by ancient trees.

Arriving to that High School, of totally different nature and led by totally different people - who could see their students still being children and by no means as being some miserable convicts who must be constantly tortured and humiliated – the small delegation he was part of, it was asked by their colleagues from there to take off their belts, for there the custom is to wear them only during the official counting and assemblies, and also to take off their hats, for “there wasn't raining”.

Blasphemy! Sacrilege! Such a request made him feel unsafe... he couldn't accept that and kept wearing his uniform according to the regulation. He didn't realize then, that the constant torture he was submitted to, it transformed him in his own torturer, in his warden, in his inquisitor, and he even felt himself superior by refusing any loose. The cage's door was opened, but the bird, too accustomed to its captivity, refused to fly. The chains were cut, but the slave was afraid of being free!

What a state of freedom, of serenity, it was there, and how normal were the relationships between the human beings from there! During the mandatory study, you could also play a match of football or of basketball! After the evening counting, everybody rushed to the classrooms for watching a football game of a movie...

But that was the situation there!

Here, the students of his High School, when escaping for the City, after jumping over the fence, they were crossing

the few tens of meters of the boulevard, and then they scattered amongst the buildings from the other side. They were an easy target to spot, due to the blue uniform they wore (now I am thinking at the orange uniform the American convicts wear...). A technique they adopted was to behave in the City as they had all the approvals and the justifications of being there.

Patrols were everywhere, trying to fulfill their duty, sometimes with too much zeal, and often in an advance state of drunkenness. But nobody could stand against the students' desire for freedom.

And the City was alluring them, in order to pluck them off the claws of the High School, by waving under their eyes all sort of temptations which were enchanting their hear, their sight, and their souls.

Blue and gray, the two omnipresent colors, and the masculine, tough voices, shouting out cruel commands - which the students were hearing all day - were being replaces in the City with colored explosions and with the suave clinks of the feminine voice.

They, the students, the intruders, they loved the City more than its own children did.

And the City was beautiful, especially beautiful. Leaving the High School was like a flight, or like a rolling down; the geography of the City it was constantly descending, because the High School was on the upper part. That made it easier for you to get far from the High School, and it required effort to come back to it.

Just beyond the monumental gate of the Stronghold, gate that separated the Upper City from the Lower City, there was the teahouse, where, though illegally, they served the students with vodka, or cognac...

After drinking their "tea", still descending, and also with ease, you got lost in the Lower City, whose abstruse corners swallowed you, hid you, and protected you.

You almost forgot, due to the intense feelings, about the fact that you must turn back. Your own self tried to defend, to flee from, to forget the continual aggression you were submitted to, inside the High School's walls.

There implacably came the moment of return. It felt like having lead legs. While climbing the streets towards the High

School situated at the foot of the Mammoth Hill, the City used even the gravitation to pull you backwards, to keep you in Its leisure nets.

You were fighting the City's temptations and you were going back. Because of the fear. Desperate. And, also because there it was your platoon you were a part of! You totally belonged to your platoon!

The negotiations with the sentinel and the sneaking in the dormitory or in the class room were the last phase of the process, and maybe the most risky. There it was following a great state of exhaustion, accompanied also by an even greater disgust.

Slowly, you were entering the rhythm, you were entering the program, and you were taking back your position within the Platoon's entity, and the High School was gaining back Its rights upon you, trying also to steal away from you, your personality by strapping you up in a straitjacket: your own worn out uniform.

Mostly of the time the motives you escaped for the city were mixed, and not so clearly defined: bravado, boredom, love...

Against love the High School fought the most difficult. Love was an awful adversary. The romances started around the third study year when, together with the beginning of the adolescence the students had a lot of time to spare. Escaped from the stress the exam for promoting in the last two study years, they still considered the baccalaureate as a far cry. Their soul, touched by the eyelash of the sunrise, budding and thirsty for love, it threw itself in the abyss of the sentiments without any sorrow, doubt, or fear. They didn't know yet the sufferance caused by the lost love and that caused by the failed expectations, and neither knew they about the fear not to suffer.

But there were also other reasons, not quite as noble as love, making you to "jump the fence". And one of them was the hunger! You ate something and turned back. Sometimes, you just craved for a cookie!...

Smugglers

“I have some ice cream... Do you want some?”

The “vanguard” spoke. He whispered, getting only his head in through the open door of the classroom.

“Yes! We do!”

“How much do you want?”

After perfecting the transaction, the vanguard left, and in a couple of minutes reappeared accompanied by one or two of his colleagues, who were wearing hanging travel bags on their necks, stuffed with ice cream. Some other times, they brought cookies. It didn't matter! Important was that the stuff was bought cheaply as sold expensively - sometimes even three times the buying price!

They exploited the demand and supply law. They also knew that that hour was the moment the hunger had already kicked in.

One was on guard, lest they were caught by a professor or, even worse, by a commander. The other members of the smuggling team sold the stuff as rapidly as they could, and they gathered up the money.

There was a special type of bootlegging, more dangerous, that was bringing higher profits: selling cigarettes. The smoking was totally forbidden and fiercely punished in that High School. Despite the whole opposition faced by the students who were smoking, they continued to find new ways to let themselves prey to their vice, by contriving all sort of cigarettes hiding methods, of dissimulating the stuff and the smoke resulted by burning.

Cigarettes were hidden in the lining of the coats and of the hats. Sometimes the students dared to smoke even on the company's hall, in the presence of the officers, for they knew those officers were heavy smokers and, consequently, they no longer smelled the cigarette smoke. While cleaning up the armament, the students introduced their lit cigarettes in the gun barrel that had the same gauge, and so the smoke as forced to exit to the other end of the barrel, through the firing mechanisms, fact that made it less visible.

Maybe just the fact they were submitted to all sort of interdictions was the trigger for such behaviors, for, that

discipline pushed at the limit of the bearable it actually created the psychological need to transgress it in all possible ways.

If they had the permission to leave for the City any time they wanted, maybe the attraction of the forbidden fruit it would have decreased in timer; if the smoking was allowed, and therefore it wasn't a sign of bravado, maybe less of them would have become smokers...

Hunger

"Can you give us some bread, please?..."

"Why are you keep coming and begging for bread? If a give you now, I won't have enough to give you for lunch!"

"Please!"

"Ok, I am giving you one kilogram of bread. Share it!"

And they were ten students.

Sometimes they managed to steal some bread when the bread truck was unloaded, but that happened rarely, only when they were summoned to do that downloading.

Cold, but also - and even more present - the hunger, were the two constant conditions they lived with. Sometimes they finished their meals while still being hungry, despite the fact they ate all that crap they were served with.

They were constantly hungry!

Theoretically, the menu was calculated so that it provided them with the necessary quantity of diverse elements a growing up organism needs. Did the norms take in account the savage efforts the students were submitted to? Of course not! Did the norms take in account the constant living in cold, so that their young bodies consumed more in order to keep them warm? Surely didn't!

And there were the legal way of lying and stealing: the "substitutions"! - Namely the calculation done for providing the same amount of calories by giving the student to eat some other food. Meat was substituted for lard, the lard for bread, the bread for air and effort, so that the students ended to be constantly hungry, craving for a piece of bread.

For instance, a half of butter package had to be divided, according to the norms, in four, and the logistics divided it in

eight, so that the slices resulted were more transparent than London's smog. On the buns were spread with that jam stuck on the knife after a quick deepening – an almost mimicked one – in the jar. The cheddar didn't reach the students' stomachs because it was stolen by the logistics personnel even before being brought to the food storage. Sometimes the students were given apples, if those small and wrinkled fruits, perforated by worms, could have been called apples.

At that lunch though, the insensibility reached a new peak. The students were given as soup, some concoction, containing some few and scarce beans – probably not washed before they were thrown it in the pot, so that the dirt colored the water in brownish-blackish something... Didn't the logistics personnel have any children? Crowning that total lack of respect for their young fellow humans, that concoction was navigated as by some boats, by sliced of fodder beet that could have had great success in a bull farm.

Some of the most craved for position was to be on duty on the dinner hall, when you could stuff yourself up with food. You were given to eat as much as you could, and, being chronically hungry, you kept eating, and you didn't have "time" to participate to weighing the food the personnel got out from storage in order to prepare the next meal for all the students. The poor third year student stood no chance against the logistics jackals.

He, the student, was on that duty only once. The lucky he was, he was appointed on a day when they had for lunch fry chicken and smashed potatoes. He ate around two kilograms of chicken meat in a couple of hours. He wondered very, because he noticed that when the frying finished in those trays were plenty of chicken thighs, but when reaching the dinner hall the trays contained only backs, necks, or other bones with very few meat on them. The smashed potatoes they were served with, it was also insufficient, because in each plate were around ten spoons of it, approximately as much as a fourth month little child usually eat on one sitting.

Being this perceived as a given, as a state of fact, the logistics personnel responsible for feeding the students, they didn't even hide their stealing, but they even boasted with it. The non-commissioned officer who was the storage manager,

he often praise about how he was dividing the cheddar rolls on one day, and how on the students tables reach only a quarter of the official quantity... maybe the chances were to feed the students with pure air, but the consumption documents must have been somehow justified!

Another thing that betrayed the lack of any human feeling was the way the students were served with tea. That tea a company commander was telling about: "Today, at breakfast, we have tea with very, very, very much water!" The cups weren't ever filled up, as there was even the water stolen...

Fruits and vegetables were the most the students were craving for! Behind the High School there was the house of a little old man who, on the know hours, he came at the fence and sold some pears strongly smelling of paraffin – probably because they were polished with in order to prevent them rotting. That smell was so strong than it was almost impossible to eat those pears. But hunger was stronger than disgust. Not to mention the price paid for such a treat, it was insanely high!

On one agricultural campaign the students were brought to harvest apples. In the first moments they were overwhelmed by the beauty of the huge, red and yellow fruits. The branches of the apple trees were bent down under the weight. For the first half an hour or so, they didn't do anything but they ate, almost without feeling the taste, throwing down in the digestive tract, almost swallowing without chewing as large pieces as they could. After they gorged themselves, they started savoring the aromas of the wonderful fruits, sucking the juice and spitting the pulp, searching for a method to stuff a little more their already full stomachs. At the end, they only bit, once or twice, some fruit that seemed to be more beautiful than others, and then they threw it at a colleague, jokingly.

When leaving the orchard, they filled their bosoms, their bags, their pockets, with apples. Each one was carrying his little fruity treasure like defending it from unseen enemies.

At the "Fenceless" High School from Câmpulung Moldovenesc, from qualitative point of view, the food was almost equally a junk, but, instead, there was plenty of food! In the first evening he was astonished by the huge portions of macaroni and cheese a fat and beautiful female chef – a little bad mouth too... - was pouring on the students' plates with a

huge cooking spoon. In no other day than in the first day, he was able to swallow the whole quantity of food he received during his staying there for the symposium. And, an unheard of thing, if you wanted, you could get some more!...

During the first days of vacations, after arriving home, he was continuously eating, preponderantly meat, vegetables, pickled vegetables – the pickled vegetables were quasi-inexistent in the High School's menu.

After three or four days of eating too much – because his body wanted to recover all the shortages in proteins, vitamins, and minerals, but also because his psychological need for feeling secure regarding the food existence – he started, each time, to feel sick. His internal organs, bombarded with huge quantities of food, rightly intoxicated with meat and meat produces, rebelled. Then, for a few more days he continued eating fruits, reading day in day out, frenetically, in the serenity of the “upper room”, with the extraordinary pleasure of being the master of his own program, of the master making the decision of having no program at all! The days were passing one after another, in gorging with food and relaxation – a quite unhealthy regime after all –, but he couldn't help himself doing otherwise.

Packages with food, arrived from home, were a weak palliative. Most of the students were hiding from their parents the situation they were living in. They weren't complainers! The money they received from home were almost useless, because inside the High School there was not shop, and they weren't allowed to go in the City for buying anything.

There was also the problem already mentioned, concerning the lack of appropriate spaces for storing the food, the “disorder aspect” the presence of some food could have given to a certain place, and the constant trying to avoid “an obesity epidemic” amongst the skinny students; and, the fed students couldn't suffer on the verge of the insupportable the High School constantly aimed to bring them at, could they?

“What this?”

That day, carrying on an inspection, captain “Crisis” found in one of the sports bags an apple. And, with valiance worthy of a war, he smashed that apple against the opposite wall. The remained things to him were to hate the pears

because of growing up in pear trees, the trees because they have roots, and the birds because of having the courage of flying...

Hunger had also some positive aspects. It was uniting them, in that manner that the wolves' packs are united in procuring their common meal. When some wealthy colleague received a full of food parcel he fed almost the entire platoon. There could be brothers who do not share like they, the students, were sharing almost everything they had.

What did wrong, these sons of their motherland? How hypocritical was to ask them to pay even the price of the self-sacrificing on the altar of their country – and God know they would have done it! – in the conditions they were kept in hunger, in cold, in constant physical punishments, humiliation, as one would have been trying to abolish them as human beings, as persons having souls?!...

Cold

The whole time of the four years of study they were suffering from cold. Except in the summer..., when the High School was defeated by the “reactionary” elements of the nature. This was because the students had to suffer of anything; and the cold was provided for free and it was very efficient in causing sufferance.

The High School wasn't offering heat. From the height of its position of protocol institution, it couldn't afford to get lost in sentimentalisms, in populisms like those of providing the students with food and warmth, given the fact that they were refused even the condition of human beings.

Freshly painted and constantly washed up radiators, they stood there as some relics. They were clean, they were almost art objects, but they had a paramount problem: they didn't circulate any heated water, because they were too the image of the communist way of understanding the savings.

Since the cold months came – with a slight tardiness for the student not to feel comfortable – the students were given the second blanket – some sort of blue sift wearing the stamp

of the Ministry of National Defense, maybe to guarantee the fact those blankets provided almost no protection against cold.

Shivering children, sleeping with their hands under their torso in the attempt to keep them warm, they put on for the night the pajamas, and all the other clothing pieces they had: shirts, sports suits, coats... everything they could – in the same risking to be caught and punished for being clothed irregularly. Trying to avoid catching a cold, the majority of the students were sleeping with their faces covered with the linens, for the breathed air not to come in direct contacts with the throats.

They weren't allowed to have sleeping bags - as they weren't allowed any other things which one sane man could consider them normal...

The cold accompanied you even in your sleep, and also during “warming up” physical exercise in the mornings, and it accompanied you when sitting at the table on the very cold chairs and eating the already cold meals... and it accompanied you in the classroom, where you were trying to study, to pay attention, to learn as much as you could... The cold mercilessly got to your very bones, where you were summoned on the plateau for the three daily assemblies. The cold was omnipresent, even in the summer mornings, when they were forced to wake up very early, and the tiredness and the outside temperature made them shivering.

“When I was student in High School I detached the lining of the coat and I stuffed newspapers in there. It kept me warm...” – were they advices by the cool guy the deputy commander of the company, the deputy of captain “Crisis”. Too bad their commander was somebody like “Crisis”, and not that good guy.

Third Year

The exam for promoting in the last two study years of the High School, it was gone by now. It seemed it happened such a long time ago...

Tirpitz no longer was their commander, because he was promoted, probably at the pressures the parents exercised, on

a position where he was responsible with the communist propaganda in the Highs School and he was “pulled out of production”.

So, they, the students, could take care a little of their own souls. They could live on the fat land now!

The two new commanders they had, they were quite nice guys. Accustomed to the lack of humanity manifested by the commanders they had before, the student started testing the new ones, who begun their job with the handicap of the wrong back ground, the students were given before.

Group cohesion results out of the fight between personalities and consciences; group members fight each other in order to establish inter-human relations favorable to them. Once settled down, it is a huge task to reset the relationships within such a large group as their company was. But patience overcomes everything, while the love endures everything, understands everything, and forgets everything.

At that time they, the students, were entering timidly, but with an overflowing joy of living, the adolescence. The City was becoming increasingly alluring to them.

With the complicity of some Great Souls of the Highs School – some real Professors – the students “hid” themselves in specialty laboratories where they were almost continuously studying. They also discovered the Library. It is true, the books were lent parsimoniously, but the general practice was to set in place a schedule and the readers shared an interesting book by reading it day and night, often in cold, often in the lavatory, in the weak light of a under dimensioned light bulb.

Now there it was more time for dialogue. Now they started to know each other better, for the inhibition affecting them during the two years was no longer there. Now the discovered the fact they could speak to each other with a normal voice, and not only by whispering because of the constant fear of being heard and punished for the simple fact that they were trying to communicate...

The effects of the “robotizing” Tirpitz it applied upon them so sadistically didn’t vanish immediately. Due to that, they weren’t able to communicate normally with their new commanders. In the vision the students had, the commanders were some bullies; they gave you orders and you executed

those no matter how insane orders, and then you reported about executing those orders. And that was all, regarding the student-commander “communication”...

O course one can't deny the necessity of a strong discipline. That is essential in the army. That is paramount. But the freely accepted discipline must have at its basis the capacity of communicating, of convincing. There's no need for fear, for forcing, for beating, for torturing, because not those things are the ones shaping the collectives of fighters or the brotherhood manifested amongst militaries during extreme situations.

The High School promoted, though, assiduously, that kind of “discipline” in order to maintain which, the treatments applied to the students were pure terror and torture.

Now they were looking forward to the Sundays with hope, for they were allowed to break the prison and evade in the City that was waiting for them in a state of continual celebration.

The military student didn't resemble too much to their civilian fellows, even on the contrary. They were preferred by girls because, living amongst men, they approached these feminine wonders with some kind of attractive fear, vulnerability, piousness, gentleness, and respect.

Tired by the constant struggle the live in the High school, in the City they were searching for quietude, for serenity, and they had nothing to demonstrate their “masculinity” for, in the presence of the girls.

One cannot deny the effect the uniform had; and the fact they were clean, respectful, and well educated.

The curricula of the third study year contained a couple of “practice” in the mechanical shop situated on the upper floor of the High school.

In that flooded with sun workshop, and which offered a magnificent perspective over the City, there were a few engines, a few workbenches, and many technical drawings covering the walls. The classes were held by a military foreman, whose main concern was to preserve the cleaning in that workshop.

Once everything was shining with cleaning, the presence of the military foreman at classes was continuously evolving towards zero. The students were assigned the task of

filling up a practice notebook with the content from a model practice notebook.

Very soon, that volume of work was exhausted. They, the students, were vegetating suspended in the sky, on top of the High school... like blue iguanas, sunbathing, and taking naps, engulfed by the warmth the High School was no longer able to refuse it to them.

Within that workshop were being spread the colored fragrances of the dreams; the reverie was whispering serene symphonies, by waving its eternal folds in a sweet forgetfulness.

Those engines seemed to be some metal monsters, defeated, whose souls had been locked up in the practice notebooks...

Summertime arrived and the vacation was nigh, but a feeling that something bad was to happen, it hovered as from nowhere... Suddenly, they had been announced they were to parade in front of Ceausescu, the communist president of the Republic, and for that, they there were to prepare with maximum "exigency".

On the plateau appeared white lines drawn at eighty centimeter from each other, used for exercising the parading step. This regularly dimension didn't fit at all the reduced body size the student still had. The military regulations' provisions were conceived for grown up man, and nobody thought at adapting them to the given case of the military high school students.

Commander of the parade training had been appointed a major, who was wearing thick glasses, barely seeing, a totally falling behind those times officer, wandering without knowing why, in an elite military institution. To his misfortune and towards the student's sufferance!

Many stories were circulating about that officer. Once, a student tried to avoid being caught and hid himself in a wardrobe. When the officer opened that door, the student shouted out loudly:

"Boo!!!"...

The officer fainted, crushing his face against the floor, and the student escaped...

Platoon's supra-individual being didn't let him, the student, to leave and hide somewhere. Helplessly, he stood there watching his colleagues parading endlessly, exposed to be caught and deconspired... he was like a cheetah cub, not being able to run away from the place his mother was fighting the hyenas, being therefore exposed to their attack...

"Why aren't you in the parading formation?!"

He, the student, answered, lying, that he would have wanted that very much, but he had been forbidden the physical exercises due to his high blood pressure...

"Can you believe it?!... High blood pressure?!... And you still are student in a military high school?!..."

The lie functioned. And he, the student, started hiding ever since, paying also attention when traversing the plateau, for thoroughly trying to avoid being caught by any similar "dangers".

Yeah! He was desperately trying to get as much study time as he could, in order to prepare for sitting the exams for the Military Medicine Faculty, and he gave no shit on forming his parading step at eight centimeters sharp!

First target of the deceit, regarding the parade to come, it was the Magnificent Gnome. That one, in order to catch them off guard, he waited for their arrival on the sports facility, for physical end of the year exams, counting thus on the presence of all students, without no excuse being invoked by anybody for a justified absence.

He, the student, had a premonition. Without knowing wherefrom that idea came, he constantly wore in his pocket two pieces of red cardboard, around four centimeters thick. Like usually, his boots were three or four numbers (European size) bigger.

Two students, one too high and one too small for the parade's requirement, had been measures and then placed – for ensuring the rapidness of the selection to be done – on the two sides of the alley, at one meter from each other. Their colleagues were passing between them and stopped in order to be compared. The selected ones went to the left, and the rejected ones – because of their height – went to the right.

He, the student, on the pretext he was adjusting his socks, he quickly place, unnoticed, the two pieces of cardboard

in his boots, becoming thus two centimeters higher than the request was.

Then he walked between the two colleagues and anxiously – but faking a deep calm state – waited for his fate.

“Go to the right!”

So he escaped of being included to the parade block, and the future looked good for him. Now he could study all the time his colleagues were taken and endlessly tormented with that stupid parading, an activity unfit for such young militaries.

In the month to come his colleagues’ torments exceeded any limit. As exceeding any limit of the good sense was to deprive the students for the time of study they so badly needed in order to sit the baccalaureate and the exams for being accepted to the officers’ military schools. The students are student for study!

He was studying so zealously! He was able to recite the anatomy book – one of the pillars of the exams he was to sit at the faculty of medicine – from end to beginning. One could open the book at a certain page, and he was able to tell by heart, everything that was written there. He was also able to tell if some text was on the right or on the left page of the open book. Chemistry and physics textbooks and collections of exercises were shattered by his live or death style of studying.

The High School set another impediment in order to hinder them. The condition was to be in the first fifteen percents of all students, classified according to their general average obtained on all study years, and at baccalaureate exam. Therefore, one must prepare both sides: to all disciplines of study where to achieve maximum results, and to the disciplines one was to sit exams for being admitted to the faculty he wanted.

Due to this stupid requirement, the chances were against the military high schools’ graduates, and more favorable to the candidates coming from civilian high schools who had to prepare better only to the study disciplines they were to sit exams at. And this was another example of the politics for ensuring the preservation of the “army’s connection with the people”.

But they, the students of the Military Highs School still were elite! And that was due to their excellent professors, who taught you in the classes almost everything you had to know.

There was also an acerbic competition between students. All of them were pushed to the limits of their intellectual capacity. And they studied in cold, in hunger, in constant bullying, in physical exhaustion...

Some of the students from today aren't interested in learning?!...

They wanted learning with the whole their strength, by overcoming seemingly impossible to surmount difficulties, but THEY HADN'T BEEN ALLOWED TO LEARN!!! Maybe that's why they wanted it so much...

After graduating the third year, during the summer vacation, he, the student, went to a chemistry summer school. He lived there wonderful moments! Amongst the students there were shining like some stars, the girls. And the boys were constantly manifested their immaturity...

He immediately made friendship with them all and ascended, amazed, in the universe of those who had spent together, boys and girls, the high school years. He had a keen feeling that he had lost his childhood! Each time he approached that reality he was then living in, he was being chocked by a sentimental void. He felt himself like an amnesic being unable to integrate himself amongst his fellow humans.

But what fresh and animated were the moments of intense feeling he was living during that short time! How greedy was he of watching attentively their behaviors, their reactions, and the way they were communicating in! How relaxed he felt in that state of pure normality!

Birth Places

Lying gently along the river, that small village stands at the foot of the slopes of the Moon's Hill, a hill reaching five meters in height.

People of that area, both gentle and proud, are soaked with that sapience of the peasants who escaped the slavery of the landowners, peasants who survived the repeated

adventurous trips they undertook to America, for earning money, in order to buy land from their former masters, because they needed to feed their families.

On a general scale, the people there are connected to each other by kinship, and also by belonging to the village's community. There it was a saying: "What the world is going to say about this?" - And that expressed the attitude of respect for the community's laws.

On both sides of the road connecting his village with the neighboring localities there were majestic pear trees, producing autumnal fruits. Their rich harvest delighted the looks and satiated the hearts of the passersby.

Surrounding the village, there were rooted huge forests, and upper, the barren hills were blanketed with tall waving herbs, and here and there, there were bushes of hawthorn and of wild roses.

Above the village and cutting deeply in the Moon's Hill, there was a quarry of gigantesque dimensions, seeming not to advance at all, despite the fact the bricks factory at its foot was in full swing, gulping thousands of tons of clay on a daily basis. Gigantic excavators were biting the hill's yellow flesh, disemboweling it, crumbling down that rich in gypsum soil. The production flow continued with the bulldozers pushing down the raw material and then, the conveyer belts fed the entrails of the factory-beast, where the giant ovens, where were constantly burning bricks and tiles.

He climbed very often the path leading to the top of the quarry. Once there on top, he let himself to be prey to the wind, like the tall herbs engulfing him, trying to float, to "lean against" that air.

Broken in pieces by the real world, the infinity opened to him, intact, gladly, within his childish soul, hovering above the blue mirror of the river, or above the green endless forests overflowing over the tall hills.

The quietude embodied in those moments, accompanied by the wind's whipping. Pure unchaining it was that to him; flight towards essences... cleanness!

In the cold summer mornings, his bare feet crushed the tender leaves of clover, on which rested diamond drops of dew.

Through that light mist, he was driven to the mystical fishing places.

The frozen time didn't dare to disturb the small fishermen, those creatures merged with the nature's rhythms, with the Universe; the Universe's borderless started with and ended to that boisterous waving of a fishing cork!

What would they have cared about the World, about struggling, about sufferance, for?!...

Waving willows guarded the children, while sustaining, in the same time, with their ramified roots, the banks of the river, in order to keep the riverbed open, for the water to flow. From place to place, like some bridges, willow trunks crossed over the river; he used to sit on them, dreaming, or jumping from their height in the water from below, exploding that pure mirror in thousands of light shards. The sun, stopped above the foliage, only with difficulty it sneaked amongst the branches, casting complicit gazes.

Oh, Lord! How serene and happy was that carelessness!

Wandering the forests' unfathomable hidden places, amongst the green and raw branches of the forgetfulness, he was one with his own self.

Like the prehistoric hunter sniffed the eternity, so he sensed the moist mist of the fern and of hellebore bushes, sensation that was penetrating his soul and it was triggering diffuse, distant memories, from the common unconscious of the human race.

No man was there before! The pioneers of the interplanetary flight omitted to "conquer" the deciduous forests from around his village, and therefore the forgotten secrets of the Universe still remained undeciphered!

Sophocles' garden, within which that philosopher discovered the whole Universe, it was equally loaded up with Gnosis as there were the Star's Hills, or the limpid water of the River, or those only seemingly penetrable forests.

Have you ever stayed, dear reader, in the dusk of a summer day, lying down in the tall grass, being far from any human creature in an orchard with ripen cherries, while their heavenly fragrances flowed, almost materially, down the slope? Still are, in such places, waiting for the soul's arrival, the multicolored insects, the playing butterflies, and the quietude!

- A prefiguring of the Paradise! Adam and Eva were banished away from Paradise, but the Creation wasn't!

Command Practice

It was mandatory to the students from the third year. Trying to refuse any command appointment was inconceivable, for your dossier would have mentioned that as a negative aspect of your personality as future officer! The military High Schools' students were the only students at that time, from the entire country, officially having a dossier comprising service characterizations.

The students-corporals were appointed, in shifts, for a couple of weeks, at the command of a platoon of first or second year... Some of them overflowed with joy for the power they were given upon their fellow humans, and they exercised it with cruelty. Others failed – as they were considered at that time – due to their lack of aggressiveness... Only a few of them succeeded in keeping a coherent and normal balance in their relationships with the subordinates.

“You! Get to the apparatus!”

A slapping on the face resounded in the silence of the classroom. The student-corporal just shared a piece of his soul to the first year student, teaching his out of his “commander experience”.

Notebooks dedicated to the command practice were absolutely formal; some texts copied out of official regulations, and the beautifully colored and highlighted titles, it was totally insufficient to guide those children destined to become officers. Of course there would have been necessary the presence and the guidance of some experienced officers, knowledgeable in psychology and sociology, who to guide the students and tell them about the human personality, about the thinking processes, about emotions and sentiments, and about the group's social forming and manifesting... But who were to do that: Tirpitz? or the Atomic Gnome? or the Commander of the high School who was considering all of them as villainous?

Lightning

They were in practice time. So, to each ones' neck was hanging a submachine gun, and the platoon went to the Mammoth Hill. There they stood for a couple of hours in the shadow of the ancient oak trees surrounding the Outlaws Fountain. Some of the students were picking up wild strawberries on a neigh meadow.

It was the time to turn back to the High school, so the platoon hit the road back. Stormy clouds gathered on the sky and it started raining. The air strongly smelled of ozone. The tired and bored column of students kept walking through the rain, silently.

Suddenly, a very loud and deafening bang crushed their eardrums, and the earth shook under their feet.

They were so lucky that time! The lightning stroke a nearby tree, situated at approximately thirty meters from their position. It was preferred the nature's wood instead of the steel they were carrying with them.

Agricultural Campaigns

Each time they arrived to the High School they were sent to harvest the fruits of the field: corn, sugar beet, or fodder beet. Namely where the work was the most atrocious, the heaviest, and where even the paid agricultural workers refused to get hired.

In those autumn mornings they were freezing, for, again, they were regularly equipped, namely the thickest clothing they wore were their jackets. The tall grass and all sorts of weeds, soaked with dew or heavy with hoar-frost, they wetted the students' legs to the knees. All kind of seeds clanged on their trousers and entered their boots, continuously harassing them.

The activity was led by the tyrants of the moment, who shaped it in an absurd and grotesque competition. A Gulag atmosphere it was created there.

"Let's go, you student! Move your hand! What, do you dare to be tired?!..."

One couldn't have said they didn't have experience in what they were being forced to do! To them the agricultural campaigns begun earlier than the years of High School, in the secondary school, in the fifth grade. But now the imposed rhythm of working it was exhausting.

They worked all day long, until darkness fell. The corn rows, stretching along multiple hills and plateaus, they were exasperating the students. Sometimes you had to penetrate through the thick jungle of weeds which grew taller than the corn. When you were coming closer to some hill top you hoped that row was coming to an end, but there another hallucinating panorama opened in front of your terrified eyes. That ordeal seemed endless...

In the buses transporting them to the working places, the students were crowded like cattle. The lucky ones, who got in firstly, they caught seats. The other were lying on the bus's floor, leaning one against another. They were all of them sleeping, because the departure took place very early in the morning, sometimes even at four o'clock, in order not to lose the working time by executing the transportation on the daylight.

Arriving back at the High School, despite their awful tiredness, there followed the evening official counting, the cleaning of the equipment and of the boots on the plateau – in order not to make mess in the company's sector, the "diluted" supper, and again an official counting. After that, late in the night, they had to clean their sectors.

If the Motherland didn't thank them for they were providing food for the people, why wouldn't have the High School reminded them that It was their Master?

That day of November they left for – what do you think? -: harvesting corn! Finally they were allowed to wear cotton gloves and they were also allowed to put on mantles. The gloves they were given, almost all of them were broken or frayed, because of too long wearing.

Due to the autumn rains, the soil was soaked with water. There was also very cold, but the temperature still didn't drop below zero, so that the sticky clay was trying to pluck their boot off their legs.

Once they arrived at the front end of the corn rows, each student was given a “working front” and they started harvesting.

It was difficult to them to advance, because they had to harvest wet corn, and the moisture transformed their gloves in wet rags. They had also wet feet, because of the water that penetrated their boots and it also entered from above their boots. All the students were shivering with cold, while, pushed by their slave drivers, they were trying to fulfill the mission.

After two hours, they deeply already penetrated the rows of the enemy corn, and they were continuing their offensive, being exhausted and with their moral dropped in the all-mastering mud.

Impressed by their ordeal, the heavens started snowing with diaphanous, immaculate, and fluffy snow flecks, which were sliding down on the unseen paths of the skies, slowly descending towards the earth, by floating in smooth circles.

Snowing grew thicker, impeding them seeing. Very soon they seemed to be snowmen, harvesting through snow, covered in show corn. The end of the rows plunged in a white abyss and they also lost any sense of direction. Melted snow flowed down their necks entering under their shirts and getting them wet to the skin.

He, the student, thought at the template images, showing: snow, ringing bells, Santa Claus, and children living in cozy homes... warming themselves up, nigh to fireplaces...

Finally, the leadership made the decision to cease the harvesting, but not because they were, by any means, worried of the students’ sufferance – because they usually didn’t give shit on such a thing! - But because they got themselves wet and they got cold and they didn’t like it. Even in such conditions they visibly manifested their discontent with the situation and the intention, if the weather got better, to come back and finish the job.

After the few campaign weeks the students were continuously, chronically cold – as they continued to be during the entire cold periods of each year, from later autumn to early summer. That sickness wasn’t usually so grave to offer you the “pleasant” possibility of being admitted to infirmary.

Vacations

Leaving for High School meant uprooting, just from the first year. That phenomenon grew stronger and more acute when finishing the Officers' Military School and receiving the repartition as lieutenant in one of the Motherland's garrisons.

Leaving for High School meant leaving a normal order of the things. Thus, he renounced to a natural organization of the world he was never to find it again ever since, because the High School stole that from him.

The student became the permanent resident of the High School, where he spent more time than he did with his family.

During vacations he was only a guest at his former home. The people from home tried desperately to make him feel at home, and welcomed, and loved, but the more they tried the more that eerie feeling of estrangement and uprooting became more acute with the years passing. So that the vacations became some excursions in the realms which no longer belonged to him, in which he became an intruder, where the people welcomed him joyfully but he, inextricably, was growing stranger to them.

He tried strongly to preserve the former status quo, at least during the first vacation... But his own feeling betrayed him. The first to not be able to relate as usual to the former realities it was him...

The escape from all of these, it was the reading - increasingly more, and without any selection. He read every book he laid his hand on, from *Searching for the Lost Time* of Marcel Proust to *Treaty of Neurology*. The fact was that he escaped to the mind's realms, in the parallel worlds of the books, in an attempt of refusing to acknowledge his own sufferance.

Places of his childhood were still there, ever and forever waiting for him. But he ascertained a loss of colors and feelings. The one estranging was him! He estranged from his Self, that one who melted before in that symphony he was no longer able to hear, because he was spiritually deaf, and having a maimed soul.

Liberation

It came suddenly, when nobody thought it any longer possible: he was escaping the claws of the High school and its lackeys. It happened in on a summer day. He felt that he no longer belonged to those walls, to that grey, tyrannical, and monstrous composition of the prison he was condemned in, to spent four years, because of the guilt of having a destiny like that, where he lost the innocence of his childhood, and where he was tortured, humiliated, spiritually maimed, and continually kept in hunger and cold.

Joy was the responsible for taking their minds away, in the first moments of freedom, after they were announced the results they obtained at baccalaureate exam. They graduated, all of them! All their school obligations ended, so that the last leverage the High School had on them, it no longer existed.

All fourth year students ran in the company's sector, which was situated at the highest floor where the dormitories were, and, in a rebelliousness attitude, they opened the windows and threw all the neon tubes, down on the plateau. It was like an artillery barrage. The white explosions spread the sunny air with rainbows of glass dust. Howls of unchaining, curses, yodelers, laughter... And then an unnatural silence, an immense void in their souls, caused by the sudden becoming aware of the situation they were in...

They no longer belonged to the High School!... but they also no longer belonged to anybody, not even to themselves... Their identity was stolen away. What seemed to be a happy ending and a glad beginning it was neither of those, but they were merging in something undefined, that liberation being in fact a continuation, one more episode of their uprooted life.

Already, the most part of the "prison cells" were empty, desolating quiet, as existing purposelessly, but, as usually, immaculate clean and impeccably put in order. The younger students went home for the summer vacation. There remained only them, the graduates, some of them following to leave directly for the military schools, and few of them preparing to go and sit the exams at The Technical Military Academy of at the Faculty of Military Medicine, and even fewer (the lucky

ones...) at the civilian faculties for graduating in specialties the Army needed.

Gradually, their enthusiasm was curbed down by nostalgia and by the feelings caused by separating from one another. They felt a burden on their souls, by leaving behind that life lived together with their colleagues. For four years they lived together, they ate together, they suffered of hunger, of cold, they were tortured together... and now they couldn't believe they were to see each other in the years, to come, only by chance. It seemed they were leaving for another vacation, one strangely sad. The High School won again, by condemning them to loneliness. A part of their soul left with their colleagues, who didn't know what to do with it, for it was suffering and sad.

Remaining behind there were only the memories, the echoes of the steps on the empty halls, the little pits the boots dug in the stair steps, some names carved here and there, and, on a dark hall, the promotion banner from which, after years, some unknown boys will look at them: themselves.

Motto: “Similia similibus cognoscuntur.”⁷

Ark 1 – The Commander

“You, my sons, will you be able to fulfill this mission?...”

The one asking was the chief of staff of the Regiment, actually the one who were commanding the Regiment during the Revolution’s days. That of all kind and shapes deluge coming upon the municipality, it posed the risk of flooding each one of their destinies, and it threatened all of them with disappearance.

A general menace was hovering upon their souls, seeming, to everybody, as a giant being, an implacable one, that was stalking for them with the intention of engulfing all of them in the deadly reality it was creating.

Retrospectively, he, the officer, he often wonder:

“Wherefrom had that officer, who was then quite young – he was only a captain then – the clairvoyance, the self-control, the maturity of his action, due to whom – to a Captain! – the onslaught, thoroughly prepared and organized by the “specialists”, it didn’t take place?!

That captain seemed to be a character from those legends with semi-gods, having the power and the self-forgetfulness one needs in order to sacrifice himself for others.

“Take good care of you! If you died, you would escape!... But if you are maimed, or invalids, “those people” will cast you out like on a broken tooth!...”

Who were “those people” he referred to? Probably “those people” from all times, “those people” from yesterday, from today, and from tomorrow, who understand the fact that they can be above the law, or outside the law, and nothing would happen to them, so that they unchain their souls towards debauchery.

But lo, from time to time, a Noah, by building up an ark out of his cares, he saves the multitudes of the pure in heart people from the deluge the “fat people of the earth” prepared it to the innocent.

⁷ Lt.: “The similar things are known out of the similar things.”

“Tell us more about how this Commander was!” could somebody ask...

“He was a beautiful athlete like Apollo, and powerful like Hercules. And, especially, he had the gift of the right-reckoning! For he rarely committed any mistake regarding the simple meaning of the things. His virtues brought him nigh to the state where the mind could be detached from the passionate understandings of the things. But sometimes, being human, he mistook too...”

“And what do you want me to do now?... Do you want me to apologize?!... Get out!”

Yes, he did wrong to him, in a rare moment of fury. For upon that one, it already started to blow the storm of the eternal unsettling, that it was called by some cunning ones, as “transition”.

But he, the Young Officer, he didn't feel the mimicked as harsh words, but he felt instead the love for people, the parental affection the Commander was conveying it to him. Of course he understood that that one apologized so that, even before the dialogue ended, he felt himself soothed.

“In order to be a Commander you have to be born like that! – was the Young Officer kept repeating after that episode. You can be chief in the virtue of the happenings, because, as Petre Țuțea said, the social soil is so easy to penetrate than all sort of lizards climb up to surface. But no school in this world can teach you how to be a Commander!”

Motto: “Maxima debetur puero reverentia.”⁸

Paradise 4 – Vulture Nest

That hazelnut tree forest gave place to a group of oak trees, erecting high imposing canopies, of a dark, intense, raw green color. Those trees even changed the light of that realm, and, by mixing in it a defending shade, full of hidden places.

How did those oak trees, eight in number, grow there?! They interrupted the order the hazelnut forest had before, and now they created another order, one that menaced to grow, slowly by slowly, like some dough, taking over, in time, the entire former forest.

Being so tall, those oak trees seemed to grow upside-down, namely from sky towards earth; better said, they constituted a bridge between sky and the world beneath, having, seemingly, a theandric constitution, like being both material and spiritual.

A sharp cry of a raptor bird tore apart the smooth quietude that was melted down by the summer heat.

He looked in the direction that call – or maybe the warning of that bird - it was coming, and he saw the vulture floating in circles above the highest oak tree from there, and that the vulture landed abruptly on the canopy of that tree.

The child felt how a terrible force was pulling him forwards, a force that wasn't only curiosity or childish unrest, but something more, something that resembled to the longing of the exiled for turning back home. He felt the need to enter that parallel world the vulture was living in.

He embraced that oak tree and, despite the fact that the harsh bark bruised his knees and his forearms, he climbed slowly, striving, to the first branch of that majestic tree.

Then, from branch to branch, rotating around that tree, he ascended towards the tree top, on the increasingly thinner branches.

⁸ Lat.: “One must pay the greatest respect to a child.”

From time to time he watched down, towards the covered in moss soil of that forest. He felt no fear at all. The tree's canopy, on the measure he ascended, it increasingly protected him, by building up, on beneath of him, a labyrinth of shadows sewed in a dense net out of which the meaty leaves were growing.

He counted the main branches which carried him towards the sky, and he ascertained that there were eight of them. But the smaller branches, they also facilitated his ascent, by ensuring the connection between the main branches.

The more he ascended, the things keeping him under the mastery of the world from below, were detached and falling like some broken chains, and another light was enveloping him.

Climbing and leaning his cheek against the oak's trunk, he had the sensation that he was riding a giant dragon, flying into the world where the fairy tales were true.

There appeared, in front of his eyes, the connection between the last main branch and the trunk of that oak, where there was built a nest, out of quite thick brushwood, coated with moss, herbs, and with dry oak leaves.

That vulture looked at him for a few moments, without understanding what that human creature was doing in its world, where only he, the vulture, it could accede. Its eyelids blinked for a few times, like it would try to figure out that entire situation, and then it opened its brownish beak, out of which a sharp call burst, like a spear piercing the child's heart. Then, the majestic bird launched itself on the paths of the sky, escaping for the closest tree, where it remained to watch the happening things.

The child raised himself over the edge of that nest and looked inside and there he saw three white shining eggs, half buried in the soft moss the nest was coated with. Those three shining eggs represented to him a treasure, and in that treasure's mystery was hiding a world oozing with freedom.

It was a world that, knowing that it was understood, started to blow upon the child a warm breeze that was waving the top of the tree and, in the same time, that white and luminous threefold mystery that set the child free. The dragon,

driven by the child, was flying in the fairy tales world; the child was like on a ship, tossed by the sea's waves.

He wouldn't want to descend from there. His soul was merged with the sky and with that white light. He was one, but both inside and outside; he was unique and, in the same time he was in all the things around him.

In the end that careless dreaming scattered away, in the same time with the descent of the sun beyond the horizon.

It still wasn't dark but, though, the world from beneath was restoring its chains, angrily, upon the child's body and soul which had, for a couple of hours, wings.

The bruises caused by the difficult climbing were now much more painful. The bruised places, warmed up by the healing start, they were now wounded again.

Together with that pain, maybe even more strong, he felt a huge sadness, for being banished again within world's reality, by hunger, by thirst, by tiredness, by sleep, and by fear...

He exited that forest in running, for it was flooded with darkness, and he ran all the way home.

Up there, in the place where between earth and stars it is nothing but the flight, there remained the vulture, together with the true freedom, out of which the child's soul took, in order to plant them and to grow them up, within him, some seeds.

Motto: “Nec aspera terrent.”⁹

Banishing 3 – Officers Military School

“Why are you laughing, you stupid?!...”

“...!”

“Go to the program, mother fucker! Run!”

He executed that command and started running towards the building where his company was. The officer on duty, drunk, wobbling on his feet, stopped him and, in a first phase, he believed that that one was joking.

He smiled in a reaction of defense, staying on “upright” position...

That cursing didn't bother him too much, either the coarse behavior. He lived such realities for four years in High School.

“What that mother fucker wanted?!” asked a colleague.

“He wanted to fuck his mother up!”

He was appointed chief of class, by the platoon commander, and therefore he was the one replacing the commander when that one was missing.

When he was appointed, he protested, quite weakly, but he had a real intention to refuse that. The bad thing was that he was way too disciplined to disobey an direct order, or to really protest against it!... This was the thing his military education offered him: a pathological manifested discipline! During his entire life he was to fight bitterly this kind of discipline, one confiscating any initiative, any resistance, and which made him taking any order, no matter how aberrant, as a stringent personal problem which he must solve.

On that august afternoon, he and all his colleagues were looking, astonished, at their lockers, broken and devastated by the graduated students, who stole their equipment in order to complete the equipment they were missing and, why not, to sell it to the ones who need it...

⁹ Lat.: “Do not let yourself to be scared by hardships.”

The graduated ones were liberated on month before the former first year platoons turned back from the summer vacation. Nobody warned the future victims about those things which were happening each year... Actually, that idiot phrase, perpetuating a certain tolerance regarding the stealing, it was to be uttered again: "In the Army nobody steals, they only complete what they miss!"

That meant that the students from the higher years took what the lacked – and not only equipment – from the lower grades students, and got away with that, unpunished, or, in the worst case scenario, they got arrested for a couple of days, or they were punished by being tormented with excessive physical exercises.

Because of the way in which the military instruction breaks your normal connections with the social environment, with your family, and it washes your brain and ties you to the military system – and this is a recognized main purpose – when the individual is not together with his platoon, or when he didn't have the corresponding equipment for participating to a certain activity, the military individual suffers the same bad feelings as an orphan who participates to a school celebration and only to him, out of all the participants, nobody came from his family, or there is only his grandma, whose presence makes him suffering even worse.

So felt the two platoons. They urged their chiefs of class to report the commanders what happened. What – despite that pseudo-cultural saying: everybody hates the whistleblowers – it happened, finally.

It followed a - so to speak – inquiry.

"What? Don't these stupid know the customs? When they will graduate, won't they do the same?" – Maybe this was everybody's thought when hearing about their complaining.

But nobody foresaw the attitude for defending the status quo the third year students adopted; their "right" to "complete" their equipment was menaced.

"How comes that?!.. Our equipment it has been stolen also... What we are to do now?"

There followed a prolonged council the third year students held. The discussions were abundantly soaked with

the alcohol they sneaked in – despite the strict interdiction – when they arrived from vacation.

Full of courage, and also pushed by the fear caused by that eventual lost of status quo, the third year student attacked the two dormitories the students of the second year of study were in.

One of the most “done” attackers, a quite chubby one, age around twenty four – coming from the healthy worker class element – raised the door out of its hinges, boasting with his physical strength, and he wielded it above the heads of the present ones, obsessively asking the same question and curse:

“Who the fuck, the whistleblower is? Mother fuckers! Spit it out!”

Because of too much alcohol, he suddenly felt sick and dropped that door on the floor and ran to the toilet, vomiting on his way.

The agitation and the cursing continued during the night, but, “torpedoed” by too much drinking, all the defenders of the “normal order” fell asleep, and the second day they were too sick to continue; and after a couple of days everything was forgotten.

Even the next day, all the students were announced that they are going to participate to the “gymnastic round”, that was to be held in order to glorify Ceausescu, so that they were ordered to pack up. That evening they left for Bucharest...

That train trip was awful! The event benefited of a few wagons attached to a normal train. In that few wagons traveled, crowded, a few hundred of students,

It took almost a day to arrive to Bucharest, for that train was going so slowly, it was stopping in each rail station, and it often gave room to other more rapid trains to surpass it.

The officers commanding the platoons and the companies were much stressed. The preparation held with the party leaders and with the counterintelligence officers was kicking high. They mustn't loose, by any means, the tight control upon the students, to avoid these ones having “hostile manifestation” addressed to the communist party, and also to avoid to be incapacitated with poisoned water, or with who knows what else! Each officer played his head on the success of this “gymnastic round”.

He, the student, was also held responsible for his colleagues. He must constantly know where they were on each moment, to watch them not to forget their equipment in that train, or to correctly execute their sentry duty where they were waiting on the platform for some transportation to come and pick them up. They must also to “behave according to the laws and to the military regulations”. All those responsibilities meant to him the futile fight against the truth expressed by the saying:

“Put any man, even a university professor, a military hat on his head and a belt around his waist, and ask him climb in the back of a military truck and, after no more than five minutes, he will start whistling after women passing on the street...”

Finally, a few buses arrived and the students were embarked in them. After another couple of hours of travelling in those hot tin cans, the contingent was accommodated to the casern of a mechanized regiment.

That casern was poorly maintained, decrepit like the state of the entire army it was on the times of that “golden époque” (a state that proved to be, though, much better than the state or the army in the tome which followed!...).

Giant dormitories– that casern was built during the time the Russian political commissaries and of the Russian occupation - provided around fifty bunk beds. Those rooms stank with perspiration, with hot linoleum, and with “skunks”- stinky unwashed socks. It must there were around fifty degrees Celsius. The students were purely and simply dehydrating and, at least at the beginning, many of they were admitted to the regiment’s infirmary, which proved to have insufficient capacity of treating so many sick people.

After a few days, worried of what was happening, the leadership of the “gymnastic round” managed to provide some mineral sparkling water and some wormy apples, they distributed at lunch. Either because of that, or maybe because of the fact that the students adapted to the new form of torture – heat, lack of water, exhausting physical efforts -, the number of the admissions to the infirmary dropped to almost none. The draconic training for integrating each individual in the supra-

individual organism of the “gymnastic round” was no longer impeded by anything.

At that makeshift tribune, erected at around four meters high, on the sports facility, there stood the beast: a lieutenant-colonel, who was shouting out at a microphone, all round the nine hours the training lasted daily.

That officer wore the insignia of the border guards. What specialty he really had, God knows. Wouldn't be a bad idea, in order to get rid of all absolutist parasites sucking the blood of this unfortunate people – Phanariote, soviet, communist, capitalist, or royalist! – to unveil the names of the ones who were tormenting their own people in order to please their temporary masters.

From time to time, when he lost his voice because of constant shouting out – he, the student, suspected that maybe there was also the alcohol making that officer being so aggressive and turbulent... - he sat on a bench, on that platform, under the scorching sun, being, seemingly, sick.

Those almost two whole months were a first contact he, the student, made with the paranoia, or maybe the chronic depression, which that officer manifested to the people whom he guided, and by constantly changing the already existent rules – a continual “modifying the modification”, and through the incapacity of finishing the work one had to do.

The forms created by positioning the students' bodied on the field were daily modified, as were also the placed to begin and end the physical exercises... all those changes wasted the physical and the spiritual energies of the performers¹⁰.

How scorching was that heat!... On that sport facility the grass totally vanished, a long time ago. Its place was taken by a very thin dust, not a sandy one, but rather a muddy one.

¹⁰ The disease of vainly wasting the energies of the people by its leaders it is an endemic one at the Romanians. This tendency could be categorized as crime against humanity, because it wastes the vital energy of the Romanians who, by their genius, it could save the mankind (like many Romanian waivodes saved the Christianity!). The archetype of such a killer it could be simply defined as: he doesn't aim by the decisions he makes or by the critics he expresses, to solve the problem, but to offer to himself the satisfaction of the power he temporarily had. The more irrational his decisions are, the more unfair his critics are, and the more pain and sufferance he caused, the more he felt more personal pleasure.

That dust, when stopped by the nasal mucous membranes, it quickly was transformed in mud, which the students eliminated in a shape of black and thick snots.

That dust even stuck to the oral mucosa and was swallowed with the water the students couldn't get enough of it.

That dust glued to the sweat bodies, penetrating through the clothing – always the same one – washed in the evening only with cold water and soap...

The nights were the most unbearable of all! The students soaked their linen in water and packed their naked bodies in them, in order to get some sleep. After a couple of hours they woke up, because of the suffocating heat, having their bodies washed in sweat. Those nights it seemed the air itself was no longer able to breathe and it was choking, with hatred, on itself!

Child of wilderness and of freedom, he, the student, explored even in the first days, during the lunch break, the hidden places of that caserne. In the vegetable garden, deserted who know how long time ago, amongst the tall weeds, he found some tomatoes, rather unripe than ripe. He picked them up and he savored their sweetish and somehow artificial taste. Likewise, next to a depot fence, in the almost withered grass, he discovered some half rotten prunes, and he cleaned them and he ate them...

Those hunting gestures not only offered him some more vitamins, but they offered him also a psychological advantage, some kind of sensation that he controlled the situation he was in, that he escaped, actually, even for a while, the torture and the terror he was submitted to.

They just arrived to the National stadium, where the final training sessions were to take place. There were present all the participants to the North Korean style show, that had also Romanian absurd improvements, and they were waiting for the training to start, when that sad news spread amongst them. A little gymnast girl, the one that was to climb all the way to the top of the bodies pyramid, she leaned against the bus's window and that window broke and the little girl fell off the bus and died...

“This is nonsense! You’re talking rubbish! These are only rumors! Get in line! Let’s repeat the exercises! Shut up, you!...”

The communist commissaries started to do their job. It wasn’t allowed at all that, no matter what, the students’ moral to suffer. The show must be unhindered by anything!

What the power knows to do regarding somebody who cannot take any more persecution? It burdens him even more!¹¹

He, the student, felt some sort of pride when their “gymnastic round” was a success and even Ceausescu – the Supreme Commander – and his wife, and all the members present there and belonging to the high levels of the communist party, applauded them.

It was an example of how the tormenters of the human being discovered, in thousands of years, that the mental processes of their victims can be altered in order to create that “special” connection it occurs between the executioner and his victim.

Another couple of days and there were back to the Officers Military school. And again, they were about leaving... The motherland had its crops to be harvested and except them: the military students, there was nobody available (and maybe also unwilling) to provide the people with bread.

So, a new long trip started, towards that Great Island of Braila. Starving, and dying with thirst, the students gave some money to the children they met in the rail stations where their train stopped, and begged them to buy something to eat, or a pack of cigarettes. In some cases the water bottles remained to those children who, because the train left, were unable to give them back...

Desperate because of thirst, he drank some water from the train’s sink, despite the fact there was a warning message saying that that water wasn’t drinkable. It had a strange, rusty, filthy, metallic taste, as like the whole dirt from that wagon was

¹¹ This reasoning it is generally characteristic to all forms of power, to all political regimes from everywhere. But this is good, in the end, for in its blindness, the power creates martyrs. Thus, by mastering over the material world, the power forces the spiritual to rise up and to escape the worldly power’s control.

dissolved in that water. He wondered later for he didn't get sick!... Probably – and he ascertained that later, on numerous occasions –, their organisms of physically abused young men it became very resistant to any imbecile challenge it had been submitted to.

How else, the agricultural organization they followed to be slaves to, it could transport them but like cattle?!... Thus were the students brought to the stables which followed to be their dormitories for the next two and a half months, in trailers tied after some tractors, trailers which were, for the whole route, wobbling and jumping like mad goats.

All roads were made of dirt; full of pits, of trenches, and – except for some rare few minutes of raining – covered in a few centimeters layer of thin dust in which the booth were sinking like in brownish water.

In those stables, the students took the place of the animals which were just removed before their arrivals; the mangers were still there and they were still filled up with hay. In the winter to come those stables were to shelter the cattle that farm had.

Some peasants were put to whitewash the walls of those stables and they did it very approximately, covering the dirt; and then they installed some military bunk beds, on which were laying some almost perished mattresses. If the rats had stayed without moving, those workers would have been whitewashing also over them. Rats were teeming everywhere.

You had to hang your backpack as higher as possible, even on the electric wires hanging from the ceiling, otherwise it was inevitable not only to be visited, but also perforated and chewed away by rats.

The least oriented students, who didn't hurry to occupy beds above – out of nescience or out of carelessness – they kept at hand some roods made of corn stalks, and they hit the too daring rats which were trying to climb on them, rats who were perseverant, indolent, only approximately scared of humans, having long tails and squeaky mouths...

Around that pseudo-locality there were seas of cornfield and oceans of potatoes plantations. He never saw before, such a landscape. The line of the horizon was always leaning against

the cornfield, and only rarely it was a little further, at the end of an already harvested cornfield.

In order to see the sky to had to look straight upwards. The sky was sometimes intense blue, sometimes whitish-colorless, and only very rarely stained by some white cloudy formations, scattered and without any power. Thos clouds didn't even cast some weak shadows...

During the first days they worked at detaching the leaves from the corn cobs. That wonderful invention, the Gloria combine, about which everybody said that it harvests the corn, detached the leaves, detached the grains... it did only a quarter of its job.

After Gloria's passed, big heaps of corn cobs, around the quantity of a four tonner trailer, remained on the soul. To each of that heap was appointed a student, who, usually, climbed in the top of it and started detaching leaves and then throwing the resulted cobs on a gold colored heap, which was growing up on the measure the initial green heap was decreasing. The student was descending to the soil in the same rhythm that the green heap was growing smaller.

Thus, some horizontal hourglass, containing not thin sand but corn cobs instead, it was constituted; the cause setting that hourglass in movement was no longer the gravitation, but the student; that hourglass was measuring the sufferance during an entire day.

A four tons heap it was the daily working norm. Again, broken nails, infected fingers, arms pains, back pains. And hunger. And thirst. The shouting out of the platoons' commanders... The dislike. And the fight with yourself in order not to cede!

At a moment there appeared, at the edge of a harvested field, a few families of disadvantaged by fate, people. They were carrying their children with them.

Almost the entire day those people didn't do anything. They just sat there and made constant noise, by almost incessantly quarreling with one another.

It arrived the time for lunch. They, the students, were provided with a half of fish can and a piece of bread weighing 150 grams. The people described before, they were provided

with cooked food in big pots, brought by a horse cart. The breeze spread over the entire field a wonderful fragrance...

At noon, the quota of food per capita of student it increased at one entire fish can, given to each student, but the bread quota remained the same. It must be mentioned here the fact that, if they hadn't had healthy teeth, that dry and old bread would have been impossible to be eaten.

The time had come to be celebrated, the next day, the "Day of Harvest". Because that farm was to be visited by a party leader nicknamed "Agriculture's God", the director of that state's agricultural farm gave the order to plow even that field harvested – rather not – with those disadvantaged people described earlier. But, the drunken tractor drivers didn't commit that crime – destroying the harvest it was then considered a crime – as it should, and, even to an unaccustomed sight, it was obvious what happened.

That party leader observed it, or he was informed by a devoted to the communist system "spy", or it was simply the revenge someone took on the farm's director... the result was that he ordered to be measured the loss...

In order to calculate the loss – and depending on the quantitative measurement the punishment could be even death –, a few students were brought and they started harvesting a designated area, and the quantity determined there was to be multiplied to the entire field, in order to find out the total loss.

On the side of the road, next to that field, there was a police van, wherefrom the chief in charge with the harvesting of those corn fields was looking through the bars of the window. He was the one organizing the famine the students were submitted to during a whole month... he imagined he would become rich by stealing the money for food and falsifying the consumption documents... and he could escape with that, because on those days, such practice was almost tolerated by the communist party; the stolen money was to be shared with the "superior party organs" on a hierarchical order.

But the motif because of which he was there was because the general director who gave him the order to destroy that corn field no longer recognized that command – it was a verbal order, without witnesses – so the blame fell on that

engineer, now arrested, and who were assisting to the undertaken inquiry.

It seemed that that man was crying and begging for mercy... The students were whispered to try not to “find too much corn”. So, the fact was that they stopped searching for corn after gathering some but the quantity was bellow the limit for that engineer to be thrown in prison. He was therefore fined with a big sum of money, totalizing the salaries for a half of a year.

The food was improved after that man was released and took back his position. Maybe, the motif was what happened, or maybe not...

No change was recorded concerning the living conditions. The whole hygienic facilities were limited to a four meters long pipe, having some holes in it, hanged with some wire above a trough. Through those holes – through some of them not through all of them – it was barely dripping some water.

The weekly bath took place at the central headquarters of that party agricultural farm. On the road towards it, more dust covered the students’ bodies and their already filthy clothes, because of the transportation undertaken with the same open trailers. After the so-called bath, which was in fact a short shower with almost cold water, it followed there another dusty trip for turning back to the farm they were accommodated at.

Despite the fact that all the students knew the conditions the weekly bath took place in, all of them were keenly wanting for going there, but for a totally different reason. There it was a sort of a grocery, selling cheep drinks - mimicking the alcohol, because of being heavily “baptized” with water -, biscuits, and wafers...

“Help me! I am dying here!”

Those words were followed by abundant vomiting. Out of the stomach of that student, it gushed up the half digested food and that liquor he ingested covetously – it was sweet and he was very hungry – about a half of a liter of it.

During that night they helped him the best they knew... Some of the help was erroneous. One colleague elevated that student’s feet up, in order to oxygenate his brain, because that

one was seemingly unconscious, but that maneuver brought even more alcohol to that one's brain. Another colleague, he melted some sugar he had, in some water, and forced that poor victim to drink it.

The most knowledgeable of them all, he turned that student on his belly, in order not to choke with vomit, and that it was probably savior. That student felt sick for a couple of days more, whilst they colleagues had to share his norm of work and to fulfill it for him.

During agricultural practice period, the hunger – as it was during the whole time in that Officers Military School – it was permanent! The poor and insufficient food didn't match the physical effort they were submitted to, an effort pushed to the limits of the human being. That's why the students were in a constant foraging around, for trying to improve their diet with anything edible they could lay their hands on.

On that evening, after finishing the working program and having their "dinner", a rumor spread amongst students: there was, nearby, a watermelon field. In the beginning that novelty was only whispered, and then, by being repeated, it became certitude – having an unknown origin, being mysterious, and just because of that it was even more credible... as any rumor does.

In the first moment, he, the student, opposed the idea of going and getting some watermelons. Being the chief of the class he felt himself responsible for his colleagues. Actually, such a leaving would have been classified as "unauthorized leaving of the camp perimeter", a perimeter they were communicated in the first moments they arrived to that agricultural farm, and which comprised: the entrance to the farm to the east, the western bridge, the irrigation canal to the south, and the cornfield to the north.

But, like a specialist in the crowd's behavior said: to the rational logics there must be added also the affective logics, a collective logics, and a logics of the religiousness (of the diverse beliefs)... So that, without even knowing why, in the end, all of them left the camp...

The first leg of the journey, it descended towards that huge irrigations canal; then they passed by an oil rig. The lower area of the field, surrounding the agricultural farm, was an oil

field. Countless oil pumps were relentlessly extracting that sticky and black and thick liquid, and they were pouring it in huge parallelepiped reservoirs, made of riveted thick metal sheets. Because it was communism, and because the waste it was like a cultural item, some of those reservoirs were full and that oil overflowed the brim, creating black and stinky ponds on the soil.

They passed by that oil rig when the sun was setting; the oil workers weren't there, because they probably left for their derelict barracks where they were ending another boring and filthy day in the steams of some cheap and stinky alcohol. On the top of that oil rig there was a light, resembling to some kind of firefly, probably destined to be seen by helicopter pilots and to avoid any possible collision.

The night they descended in, it was of a consummate darkness. They had no lighting devices. It was so odd, because the stars, and the moon partially covered with clouds, they were only lighting the horizon. The students seemed to swim in a sea of darkness they were sunk in to their necks. So that, above that dark layer, there was floating some thirty bodiless heads ...

They crossed over the first irrigation canal, then the second one, then the third canal, one after another, and finally they crossed the eighth canal. They had crossed beyond, missing the watermelon field, when somebody asked, with a willing to be authoritative voice – but which was in fact almost weeping:

“Who's there?”

“We are...” answered those more than thirty lightened heads... “And what do you want, old man?!”

There followed a quite a long pause. That man never expected to fight so many attackers.

“Take as much as you want! But please do not break them and left them behind, because otherwise the leadership will fine me!...”

Nobody said anything more. The backpacks were quickly filled up with watermelons, randomly picked up. In a few minutes each of them had its load of four or five and the invading horde left towards that miniscule light they were seeing it afar off.

Now was a total and absolute darkness, engulfing them whole. They were walking in that darkness, joking in the beginning and laughing at that man's fear, but after a while, they became quite worried...

Later, that worry became fear, and then dread. That light from the top of the oil rig seemed to run away from them; the impression was that they were not getting closer at all, but, on the opposite, their destination was walking away as themselves walked towards it.

They started crossing the irrigation canals, but those canals seemed to be different as they were crossing them in darkness; they seemed deeper and now, some of them had some water ponds. The question was: were they going in the right direction?

Getting lost in that immenseness of the endless plain was equal to death, because at that time there were no communication means, the mobile phone wasn't invented but only twenty years later, and nobody knew where they left for...

Many of them slipped and fell in the mud when crossing those canals. Some of them, tired and quite despaired, were climbing the banks by crawling on their elbows and knees...

And during all that time that cursed oil rig and that light were constantly staying away from them.

He, the student, now knowing why, started uttering in his mind a prayer his grandma taught him in his childhood. It was the Lord's Prayer...

Nobody knew any longer how many canals they have crossed. Now, on the coming back, there seemed to be more than eight. Where there nine? Some of the students said there were even twelve canals...

Maybe there were twelve canals. This last one, it was the deepest canal they crossed over. In order to cross it they descended in pitch black darkness. He, the student, started praying with despair, for the perspective of being lost it was now almost certitude.

A last bank was climbed and, suddenly, and inexplicably, the oil rig appeared on their left hand. Right in front of them there were the stables-dormitories.

A sudden enthusiasm engulfed them all and they started running, silently, towards their "home".

Hunger and thirst were high, increased by so much effort. Watermelons were everywhere. The vast majority of the loot was only half ripen. The students didn't care. They were eating frantically, with beatitude, and with self-forgetfulness. Nobody was speaking... That mystical sacrificing of the heavy, fresh, sticky, and watery melons, it took place in a generalized self-forgetfulness.

By now, the rats which became their pets – also because the obstinately imposed their presence – they were flooding the room, eating the dropped pieces of watermelon, which were covering the floor as in an elegiac orgy.

Next morning, the disaster showed in its desolating splendor. Everywhere were watermelon debris and rat excrements. Some too enthusiastic students threw watermelons and crushed them against the walls, and some others threw watermelons at rats trying to kill them...

That disaster marked a change. Since then, they started harvesting potatoes, for the corn was harvested in its entirety.

In the increasingly cold mornings, the students were walking through the tall weeds, full of dew – because October was long gone by then – towards the plot where the potatoes were to be harvested.

Usually late – accordingly to how difficult it was to the one who was driving it to wake up from his drunkenness – there came a special type of combine that had a ramp with a conveyer belt. By introducing that ramp in the soil, the rotation movement of the conveyer belt was bringing up together potatoes and soil, and dropped all that mixture behind that machinery.

Clouds of dust lasted behind that combine. That dust was very thin, sticky, and it caused a persistent disgusting taste in the students' mouths. The time necessary to that dusty to settle down was quite long. Therefore the commanders asked the students to start picking up the potatoes, and, by doing so, they were ingesting the soil of the motherland and they were bathing in that thin dust.

There it was even started a competition to which participated even the officer having the highest rank from there. The rules were very simple: the one filling up the bigger number of potatoes sacks, he won. That officer wanted, maybe,

to reconcile with his soul and with his conscience, because his son was also there, amongst those students, living in the same awful conditions...

After more than two month of constant hunger, the students were starving. Some of them were eating raw corn, but, after a few corn kernels, a vomiting sensation was set in.

Others came with the idea of setting a fire at the end of the rows that combine made, were heaps of potatoes and potato stalks were mixed together. At the beginning the commanders resisted that idea, but then – for they seemed equally affected by hunger... - they agreed.

Around those small fires, there were hungry human beings who were reduced to the state of primitive people; they were waiting, impatiently, for having a hot potato, covered in ashes and dust, only half roasted – rather almost raw...

Though, what a blessing were those pieces of almost raw potato!... eaten hot, barely wiped with the sleeve of the coat, swallowed with the haste and with the sufferance of the one who was almost choking himself... with the pleasure of the one who suffered from hunger and felt how that hunger is being banished away by a warm, stiff matter, which almost stuck in his esophagus...

The evening before leaving arrived. All the crops were harvested. They, the students, felt themselves a little disappointed and disoriented: the more you one accustoms himself to a reality, the more meaningless he feels after that reality it disappears.

It was dark already. He, the student, was getting around the farm's perimeter for the last time, as he was – so odd, actually – taking a last goodbye... During that wandering around, he discovered behind a stable, a trailer with soybeans, the load of which it was, almost half of it, dropped on the soil and were abandoned there, in order to rot...

He ran quickly to get his sack for food, a piece of equipment that could be loaded with four or five liters of any edible substance. He filled that sack up and, once this state of survival fulfilled, he announced his colleagues about that great discovery he made. Like raptors, all the students rushed to that treasure filling up everything they could with that precious soybean.

At the end of a stable-dormitory, they built up some walls by using the bricks they found there, and they placed on top of that makeshift oven, a rusty metal sheet.

Under that metal there was lit a fire, which was constantly fueled with corn stalks, and in top of is there were roasted the soybeans they found. Shortly after they started roasting, the entire yard it smelled heavily of roasted peanuts...

Countless rats invaded that place. Those rats were frantically crossing over the students' boots, who, at their turn were trying to crush the rats by stepping on them. When cornered, the rats were biting the thick rubber and squeaked fiercely.

Some hungry and desperate rats even tried to steal some soybeans directly from the hot metal sheet, but, because they burnt their paws, they ran away squeaking in a sinister manner.

Humans and rats were in direct competition for food; their hunger and their despair were transforming the people in rats and the rats in intelligent beings...

Suddenly, it seemed that the rats' attack slowed down. The motif was, perhaps, the coming of that huge rat, almost twice in size, which was crossing fearlessly through that crowd.

He, the student, saw that rat; when it arrived in front of him he stepped on that animal with his entire weight. That one turned on his belly, in an instant, and it bit savagely the rubbed of the student's boot.

He, the student, felt the life pulsating under the sole of his boot. His hunter instinct told him finishing quickly that killing. Then, in the light of the flames the fire was throwing around, he saw the eyes of that rat looking directly in his own eyes. A connection of a superior level was established between them. The student saw that his position of power didn't give him any satisfaction and he also felt himself connected to the deluge of life flowing everywhere, around them, inside them... Then he slowly raised his boot and he followed with his sight, with gratitude, that being that offered him that short deepening in the knowledge from beyond appearances...

Further away, that rat stopped walking and stayed there, as there nothing happened. He, the student, he took a handful of roasted soybeans he has in his bag, and he poured

them in front of his former victim. The rat gorged himself and, after, he filled his cheeks with soybeans and, looking for the last time at his former aggressor, he slowly disappeared amongst the tall weeds.

That night he, the student, dreamt of how he was searching for the dog he had during High School, and he was desperately trying to find the way back to that dormitory where he left his friend, the rat, who was to be killed by the ones who didn't understand. The floors were endlessly multiplying upwards, and in the rooms he entered there were students, but none of them was his colleague...

Arriving back to the Officers Military School they found out that the former commander was replaced by an officer who came from the position of chief of cabinet he had at Ceausescu's wife. The former commander was a brutal and crazy stupid, terrorizing even the colonels who, at his apparition in the courtyard they ran and hid behind bushes and building, in order not to be seen and bullied by him.

Disappointing quickly occurred when everybody learnt that the new commander was psychical instable, some sort of violent lunatic, who was socially tolerated only because of the high placed people who supported him.

In that morning the commander arrived earlier than expected and he, the student, was just summoning the guard in order to wait for the commander and to present him the honors. It made no sense that the commander came close to him and punched him in the head.

The situation was slightly comic - because the commander was one meter sixty and he had to stay on tiptoes in order to reach the student's head. Secondly, the commander hurt his own hand because the student, according to the regulation, he was wearing the steel helmet.

He, the student, smiled, having the same reaction had by a child, after twenty five years, when this time a "democrat" president, running for the second presidential term, he punched that child in the chest.

The commander, unbalanced by his attitude, and because of the fact he didn't succeed to cause the usual fear, and also trying to get somehow out of the situation himself caused it, asked him - cursing him in the same time:

“What are you doing here, you, mother fucker?!”...

He, the student, didn't answer anything. He only felt himself aware of his superior physical strength and the fact that he was capable to tear that gnome into pieces before that one could realize what train hit him...

Probably the gnome felt the power, the menace, the hatred... And he left, almost running, towards the car that was waiting for him. He jumped in, and he plucked the microphone and threw it on the tarmac, shattering it in pieces, like for demonstrating himself that he still was powerful.

They, the students, could watch TV during the approved program, under the sanction of being otherwise punished with some days of arrest or, even worse, with the suspension of leave.

I wonder, even now, what menace could have posed the watching of a totally controlled by state television, having a sole channel, on which was taking place a fierce communist propaganda, a personality cult for Ceausescu?

On that Sunday there were allowed to watch a football game to which, some people, were grating an exaggerated importance. It was the second half of the game when the classroom's door was violently opened and a student in the third year of study asked them to urgently come and take part at that skirmish that was taking place at the entrance of the building where they had their dormitories.

If there hadn't been involved the alcohol and the long cultivated so called “military specialty patriotism”, maybe that story would have been a subject to laugh of.

What actually happened? A drunken student, wobbling in the toilet of a restaurant, he was trying to take a leak, and he urinated, by mistake, on the shoes of a student belonging to another military specialty. Instead of treating that with humor, despite the fact that the perpetrator apologized for what he did, the victim announced all his colleagues and instigated them to a beating.

The first who arrived from the leave were the colleagues of the drunkard. They were searching now for allies, for weapons, for protection, for individuals willing to sacrifice themselves on the altar of the human stupidity...

It is so wrong to the mankind, for instance, the fact that it fights in wars and glorifies the so-called heroes, and in the same time forgets about the old and by the new commands: "You shall not kill!" and "Love your enemy!". That's why the mankind it still incapable of accepting the Revelation!

That two floors building got barricaded. Some of the combatants drew off their belts with metallic buckles, others took some metal rods, and other simply clenched their fists and presented themselves to the "battle field".

The colleagues of the victim, rather provoked by the other part of the barricade, attacked the "stronghold". The fight started. Everybody was hitting, and sharing blows, and kicking, to whomsoever he reached...

That battle lasted for approximately forty minutes, until the officer on duty arrived in running. That officer was nicknamed "the dwarf with two meters tall girlfriend" – because he was dwarf and had a girlfriend of two meters tall...

He was desperately and futile trying to push back the attackers – who didn't have the courage to touch him or, God forbids that, to hit him. But those frantic consumers of adrenaline escaped around him and charged again and again.

Finally he drew his pistol off; he raised it up, and he tried to menace them in order to stop the attacks. But they laughed at him, for they saw the ammunition magazine was still in the holster...

But that laughter demobilized the attackers, and the fight ceased as quickly as it started. Was it because both sides found a motif to cease the hostilities, a motif that was independent to their will and therefore it spared their pride?!...

Announced about the happened facts, the commander of the school, without possessing the intellectual apparatus for understanding what psychic and sociological processes were involved there, and being in the same time scared about the fact that the communist party organs could consider him incapable to ensure the order and the discipline in that school, he showed himself up at four in the morning, he gathered the military chemistry company in the front of the dormitories, and he ordered them:

"I am ordering you that, starting with eight o'clock, the whole company will execute fortifications, in the training

range, in complete volume, in time, so that in the evening, to be buried in the ground with its entire personnell!...”

In the beginning nobody understood the majestic order. And what were they the only punished for? But, slowly, the preparation for executing that order started, and it grew up in intensity. That mill of punishment started milling the students...

Alarm, putting on the gear, walking for twelve kilometers, thirst, hunger, digging with almost perished tools, digging with the bayonet, digging with the nails... Again hunger, thirst: intentionally caused, because they, the chemists, they dared to fight the infantry students? Namely because the few dared to fight the many?...

But, like a student said:

“What could they do to us? How much could they punish us before the ones punishing us start punish themselves?”

And he was right. The one commanding the physical exercise as punishment, he also must stay there, the whole time - together with the one whom he is torturing - in order to command!...

In a pause, the survival instinct kicked in again, and he, the student, searched the surroundings and discovered on that slope they were digging it, after crossing a small group of trees and bushes, there was a deserted orchard.

He found there apples, wild pears, almost rotten plums, and blueberries: the outlaw’s food. So he fooled the hunger, together with his colleagues.

The fury of the school commander softened, his energy of enforcing that punishment vanished, so there came the order:

“Gather the gear up, count the students! Prepare for leaving!”

The platoons gathered together, the formation was constituted, and they hit the road back to the school.

“Lieutenant, sir!... Lieutenant, sir!”

Those whispers wanted to be shouts. Finally, the addressee, equally bored and tired as everybody, reacted>

“What is it?”

“I’ve lost my machine gun...”

This sentence, uttered as it would have been only for himself, like that student feared his words to be heard by others, it still had the effect of an artillery shell hitting them directly. Losing a cartridge constituted a disaster. Not finding a cartridge shell, because it was dropped in a tall and thick grass, it caused a drama. But a lost machine gun it probably determined the taking away of the battle flag, the abolition of the military unit, and even everybody's arresting. All of these were possible because Dictator Ceausescu feared increasingly more of being killed and because of that he imposed drastic sanctions even for the lost of a cartridge!

"You, mother fucker! How could you fucking lose your machine gun?! What the fuck are you saying?! Are you crazy? Are you fucking with me?"

Before finishing the tirade the officer already kicked the student in the balls, and that one fell to the ground, moaning with pain.

Everybody there considered this beginning of the punishment as absolutely normal, because they knew the heaviest punishment that could be applied to them was to kick them out of the military school and to oblige them to pay the fees, because the military education, even costly, was provided free as long as you remained in the school and as long as you remained officer for at least nine years after graduating the school.

That shock was followed by the commands to go back and search for that lost machine gun. All of them were very hungry and thirsty and exhausted, but they must go back and find the missing weapon.

With hatred, with revenge, the students were scouting everywhere, but with no avail.

Inspired, the platoon commander asked the student in cause:

"Show me where have you been digging?"

"Here!..." answered the student, instinctively making the move as placing an object in the front bank of that trench...

"Search within this heap of soil from here!" ordered that platoon commander, with his eyes shining of hope.

And they found it! That machine gun was placed in front of the trench and covered with the soil that student dug before.

Things grew cold upon that “battle” and after a while everybody forgot about it. The foreground was now taken by the alleged “rape” episode, from the girls’ dormitories.

“Alleged” because it wasn’t at all a rape, but an adventure, and even an unconsumed one, because an inspection the officer on duty on the school undertook, it determined the lover to jump out the window. The girl, trying to maintain an appearance of her morality – what would her have thinking at?!... – she didn’t find anything else to say but that somebody tried to rape her, and that she didn’t know who that student was...

Facing an unprecedented situation and because that declaration was given to an officer on duty and reported all the way up to the school’s commander, an inquiry must follow, even if only formally. Consequently, the police was called, and they brought a tracking dog, and they pretended searching the “crime scene”.

Of course everybody knew what the truth was! But any cover up needs some fake actions to be put in place.

The most hilarious episode was when the dog went to a nearby third year platoon, that was standing in formation, and pointed to target, namely sat down next to a student. Any serious investigator would have considered that as a hint, but the policeman went, with a red face, and took that dog away from there, as nothing it would have happened.

Winter time was both hated and loved.

It was hated because the students weren’t provided with any trace of heating. It wasn’t too hard to him, the student, to endure that, because he was accustomed to from High School. What it was added now, it was the lack of any hot water. Regarding the baths, they were allowed to take a shower once at any two or three weeks.

After eight, or sometimes twelve or more, hours of military training and classes, per day, sometimes followed by night training, they were refused the possibility of washing themselves up.

What to say about the underwear? It was like in the communist prisons: “today we are going to change the underwear, but amongst us...”

Desperate – because after an effort period, not followed by a corresponding hygiene, there it gathers on the man’s skin, a filthy and silty layer of grime, and the clothing and the underwear stick to it – they found the solution “to take a bath”. They clogged the sink with a handkerchief and then they filled that sink with cold water. In order not to feel that sensation of freezing, of frostbites, they threw on themselves plenty of water at once, so that it numbed their skin.

Furious steams were abundantly produced by their naked bodies, so cruelly hit by that very cold water. The whole lavatory was filled up with steams, as they would have had a hot shower. Keep in mind that all these insane practice took place in the conditions of not being that lavatory heated at all, so that the inside temperature was close to zero degrees.

Some of the students, more courageous or, maybe, more insane, they washed even their heads...

Socks were becoming not only dirty, not only smelling bad, after a training day: but, their socks become true skunks! They were like having a clay layer sticking to their boots and to their feet. The joke was that if they had thrown the socks at the ceiling, the socks would have stuck there as stalactites.

Sickness was a rare visitor. They weren’t even allowed to notice a banal cold, so that, the student complaining of it, he was sent not to infirmary but to military training. Anyway, the medicines were very sparse, and limited to a few sorts, and, in more serious cases, there was the penicillin as a universal solution.

They changed the underwear, at the company’s logistics storage unit, only once a week, but once at every two weeks it wasn’t unheard of... and nobody would have been alarmed by that.

A sick with cold, when having fever, he had no other choice but to endure the wet underwear and pajamas, and to stoically suffer the uncontrolled gnashing with the teeth, and the shivering.

On every evening they washed up their underwear, their handkerchiefs and their socks, in that very cold water –

especially in the winter – by using only soap, and they laid those pieces of clothing under the bed's linen, in order to try to get them dry. In the next morning, rather moist than dry, those pieces of clothing were put on and dry on the student's bodies, in the bitter frost from outside.

He, the student, hated the most to wash his handkerchiefs. It must be stated here that, like everywhere in the army, one could not put on any other pieces of clothing than the ones he was officially given from the company's logistics storage unit. If caught wearing something extra, you would be punished and that piece of clothing would be confiscated from you.

The handkerchiefs - those two approximately squared pieces of cloth, made of almost transparent fabric because of so long use - they were filled up with snots and blood in the few first hours. When blowing your nose you were trying vainly to find some dry, or at least not stained, place, in order to avoid that disgusting sensation of touching your nose with that rag soaked with snots.

Touching that handkerchief with your nose made you feeling the sticky liquid that cloth was soaked with, but you could do nothing else... especially when you were in the classroom or in the dormitory. When you were on the military training range, you covered one nostril with a finger and blew powerfully the other nostril, hoping that the eliminated mucus didn't stick to your face... If that happened, you would grab it with your fingers and try to cast it away. Then, in winter you will wipe your hand with snow, and in all the other seasons you will use grass or leaves for that.

How was going the washing up of a handkerchief on a winter day, when you caught a cold? Simply: you took a handkerchief and you soaked it in water. The culmination was that the snots and the blood covered that rag in a waterproof layer that was difficult to be penetrated by water. The soap only produced some white foam that remained above those snots and blood clots, without removing them.

You had to repeat that phases of soaping up and washing up, for several times, because that sticky substance was difficult to be removed. The gruesome sensation caused by

touching that filth was gradually attenuated by the numbness the cold water caused to your hands.

It was less gruesome, but more difficult to wash up, in winter, a peer of socks. The sticky matter that impregnated the soles adhered to the fabric so strongly that it almost formed a shoe sole. From time to time you had to interrupt the washing process in order to get some relief from that numbness and pain you felt in your hands and fingers, down to the bones.

In the winter the students left for camping in the mountains. The so-called military resort was situated at around one thousand and seven hundred meters above the sea level. There it was some sort of military camp, counting ten cabins of all sorts and sizes, all of them way beyond their time limit for being used in safety.

Those lumbars the cabins were built of, they were all cracked, and the wooden boards coating the exterior of the cabins they were all of them broken, and stained, and bad smelling.

In each cabin there was a terracotta stove, which, to say so, it was repaired during each autumn, but which, when the students arrived and got the fire burning, it filled the whole cabin with smoke, so that the ceiling and the walls were covered in black ashes. Not to say that it was choking the indwellers.

Between the tiles of that terracotta stove you could see the flames. Maybe it was the mountain air, so rich in oxygen, so that nobody was poisoned with carbon monoxide!...

The students attended the warming up exercise, early in the morning, naked to their waist, and they rubbed their busts and their arms and their faces with snow. Then they ran on an arbitrary chosen itinerary, and then they came back to the cabins in order to put the gear up, for the official counting. And from there they went to the dinner hall.

The food they were served with it was absolutely like the one served in a war concentration camp, or in a soviet gulag: boiled beans, stinky cabbage, rarely some potatoes, sometimes a trace of grease, and never meat! They kept the bread in a not heated storage, so that the bread was always dead frozen, and you needed good teeth in order to bite and chew it. All the meals were always cold, like there would have been an

unwritten law. When in a good mood, the logistics gave them some frozen pickled green tomatoes, having their core transformed in ice crystals, so that they had no longer any taste. And sometimes the beans were not only having sand in it, but even gravel!

Optimistically, the whole quantity of food provided them with around one thousand and eight hundred calories a day; in the conditions they were burning almost four thousands...

There were no fruit, no decently preserved vegetable except that gruesome pickled tomatoes.

And this treatment was applied to young organisms, which were submitted to extreme conditions and physical efforts...

I have always wondered why, despite lacking any resources, the communist activities still had to be carried on...

Irrationality!.. Insanity!... Torture!... Gulag!...

The necessary wood for cooking and for heating – only during the night – the cabins, were to be hewn down from the surrounding forest.

Up on that mountain there was a coarse and uncivilized forester, causing only troubles to everybody. He was acting like the entire mountain belonged to him. He was always contesting the right of the military camp for hewing down wood. In the same time, when asked, he always appointed too big trees to be cut with the primitive and almost perished tools the military had, and always very far from the camp so that added a great deal of effort when transporting the wood back to camp.

The students had a few unsharpened saws, and some military axes made of soft metal, with uncomfortable tails, seemingly fabricated as for mocking up on the users.

He, the student, he never couldn't understand what those axes, which were to resist the use in a war, they were made so poorly, as they would have been fabricated out of plasticine.

One day they started hewing down a fir tree. That was almost thirty meters high. The saw was totally blunt and when penetrating more than five centimeters deep in the wood it constantly stuck.

In order to still be able to get that tree down, a more courageous student climbed it up and he tied it by its top, by using a thick rope, made of woven hemp.

They were to find out later that that rope was too short!

Two students continued to scratch the trunk of that tree with that blunt cutting instrument. Suddenly, without any warning – when the discouragement was at its peak – they heard that tree cracking and it leaned sideways, but it didn't fall.

Here the action passed to the two students who were pulling that thick hemp rope, one being in front and another behind him. They pulled strongly. The tree cracked in a menacing sound, and it fell towards the two unfortunate students. The one from behind ran sideways, but in his dread he didn't let the rope go, so that, when the student from the front tried to escape backwards, he stumbled in the rope which was then a trap to him. And he fell on his face and all he could do, because he was terrified and astonished, was to bend his body upwards, like a cobra fighting for survival.

All of them saw his face, and his staring eyes, when that fir tree fell, whizzing in a sinister manner, and menacing to fall on that unfortunate student. The top branches whipped the snow at about a half of meter from the skull student's skull, who almost fainted because of fear.

That tree, on that day, it didn't succeed in taking away with itself, a human sacrifice.

Like so many other events, that one too, it was quickly covered up and forgotten. After all, nothing happened, or did it?

Like it didn't happen anything when, by hauling tree trunks with that huge sleigh, destined to be pulled by horsed – but now the horsed and the mules and everything one could have imagined, there were the students – when that sleigh got out of control, having piled up on it more than two tones of wood.

Initially, they tried to slow it down, by braking the sliding down with their own feet, but a student fell and he was almost squashed under one of the iron track that sleigh had. Then they let it go, and the sleigh ended in a ravine on the

right side of the military camp, after missing, by the skin of the tooth, the cabin near there.

According to an arbitrary conceived training program, the students were undertaking diverse incursions, on skis or on foot, in the areas around the camp. Sometimes, that “around” it meant even more than twenty kilometers of mountainous itinerary, and often without having any roads or paths.

After a few days, the first skiing lessons took place. They started with walking on the skis, and then they executed the turnings while standing, and then, for a little while, they were taught how to do the cross brake. After that: God, have mercy!

That snow was almost a meter thick. During the day, the sunlight melted a thin layer, maybe a half of a centimeter deep. During night, that thin layer of melted snow became a sheet of ice smooth like glass. If during that night some snow flecks fell, their formed, on that very slippery surface, also an abrasive layer.

So that, the skiing with the naked bust and the artistic falling that colleague undertook, caused him numerous cuts on his face and on his body, so that he was in a short time covered in blood. But there was nothing serious! Consequently, they laughed at him, because of his stupidity...

Even when you are acutely aware of that being only a simulation, a military exercise can have be unexpectedly verisimilar, because it triggers primary instincts to which only the cold blooded people could resist and remain calm.

So it was on that day, when the theme of the exercise was how to organize a military ambush. The officer who was with them, he sent before, without anybody knowing it, a few students, as they would have followed to go to the camp in order to help the students there to cut fire wood. In that morning, that vanguard received, in the highest secret, some blank cartridges.

It started becoming dark, so that the students formed the platoons and started walking towards the camp, on that covered in snow and ice road.

They had a valley on the left hand, and a steep slope on the right hand. That slope was covered in thorny bushes which

were, at their turn, covered in a blanket of snow so that one could see only the shining and beautiful white surface, and nobody could say anything about the dangers from below.

That slope on the left hand was descending to that little creek which - despite it was winter - it wasn't frozen, so that the water was still flowing.

The first bang immediately caused the platoons to lose their structure and to disintegrate. Even after the first seconds of bewilderment passed, the instincts were still there, forcing them to act like against their own will. That rain of gun-shots took their rationality under its control and they started running in all directions in order to escape.

Some of them ran down that slope, because it seemed easier to do that. But they ended with their feet in that creek and their boots were filled up with frozen water. In that below zero temperature their perspectives were to get frostbites during the remaining walk to the camp. So, at the first glance, the decision they made was to have bad consequence in the future.

Some of them ran up the slope from the right hand, but they couldn't advance because it was too steep and they also got entangled in those thorny bushes from beneath the snow blanket. Some of the students who took it to that side, they hurt their hands in those thorns, but it was nothing serious. Those wounds were to heal quite quickly. If they paid more attention to the signs, they could have escaped the attack.

The majority of the students, though, they preferred to remain on the road, taking no action at all, despite the fact they were sitting ducks to any attack. To those ones nothing counted, not even the possibility they had to try doing something...

On a following day a skiing contest was organized. That was an occasion to see the forbidden places, of a threatening divine beauty, where they were refused the access until that day.

The parceled sheepfolds were deserted since autumn. The established itinerary passed by the sheepfolds area, on beneath of the lowest enclosure, and then climbed the slope and turned back above the sheepfolds, and then descended toward the military camp.

As any activity is mandatory in the army, all the students were sent on that itinerary. Some of them suffered leg sprains, and one had even a meniscus rupture. Those too old skis had strips of leather with buckles in order to be attached to the military skiing boots. God forbid any falling down!

Those military skiing boots seemed to be contemporary to the invention of the skis! Torn, having laces with knots, so that it was almost impossible to attach them correctly to the leg, they were also constantly frozen. Because after each skiing lesson those boots were given back to the storage room – in fact a shack situated in the yard of the camp –, the water resulted from the snow melted inside them, always got frozen over night and, in the morning, after a few repeated similar experiences, it occurred a rejection reaction constituted of ankle pains.

In their spare time the students were encouraged to go skiing. It seemed hard to believe, but, after the mandatory skiing program, the “at will” program was frantically accepted.

On one side of the camp there was a so-called ski slope, going down on a thirty degrees angle. The previous day was more sunny than usual, so that the surface of the snow layer melted, and during the night it froze and it became a sheet of ice.

One student let himself slide down that slope, animated by his courage rather than his skiing skills. At the end of that slope, towards the right side, there it was hewn down a fir tree and, consequently to that action there remained a stump – not too high, because they were told to cut the trees as the lowest point they could, but quite thick. The fir tree needles fall during the hewing down process and an area of about thirty square meters was covered in green.

Not being able to steer leftwards, the student came with his right ski on fir tree needles and that sudden brake unbalanced him and he fell on his back, with his legs bandy, inexorably heading towards that stump.

It was too much to look at, but they couldn't stop looking at him. A sudden disaster was to come.

But, just before crushing himself against that stump, a ground elevation projected the student's body in the upwards

and, so luckily, he crossed over that obstacle, remaining unharmed.

At that time such events were good occasions to laugh at, not having any importance at all. They mocked at them and they treated them with a quick forgetfulness.

Their youth was giving them the godlike power of living carelessly.

Motto: “Stulti timent fortunam, rudis sapientes ferunt.”¹²

Ark 2 – Whistling Bullets

He, the officer, wondered a lot for that loud knocks - as a rapid and random sematron playing – which those bullet produced when hitting the poplar three right next to him, they didn't sublimate in some nightmares, neither in that night nor in the nights to come.

He didn't feel hatred for that one, who shot those rounds at him, for he didn't consider that sniper as guilty of anything. People are uselessly killing each other in stupid wars, all around the globe, only for fulfilling the sinner pleasures of the “fat men of the earth”...

Instead, his mind remained imprinted for ever with the looks of the soldiers, looks which were just like those of the little children separated suddenly from their mother's bosom, looks through which those soldiers seemed that they plucked off their souls and offered them to him.

“Do what you want with our souls! Bring us to death, if you want... but do not leave us!!! Do not let us facing death on our own!!!” – It seemed they were saying, but without words.

Those looks didn't allow him to fear. Those looks ashamed him so much that they didn't allow him running away. Those looks became his own sight!...

“Get down! From the right, two at a time, jump forwards!”

The company's multi-human organism got started moving. They weren't fighting somebody: they were fighting the fear! The soldiers feared before, not to be alone, but now their individual fear was poured and mixed with the big fear of everybody, so that each individual could find in his heart and mind a place where not to fear so much.

And this kind of courage made them feeling invincible, immortal. When being together, everybody passed beyond his

¹² Lat.: “The stupid fear their fate, the wise endure it.”

individual self in the great self of the company, a self that could be wounded but it couldn't be killed.

Some more "prudent" people could say that there wasn't any courage, but some sort of madness. But the soldiers felt that, on the measure that fear was bouncing backwards, around them there was growing a force that was protecting them. It could be their imagination, but, if that gave them courage, it meant there were bigger chances to survive, for they became unhesitating. So real it was that sentiment of being protected by a higher force, than their intense desire of sacrificing themselves was giving them an inexplicable serenity.

Courage carried them to victory, namely towards staying alive. If they had remained on the previous position, that whistling stream of death, that killer deluge of bullets, it would have been brought them death. They all were saved by the soldiers' faith in officer's capacity of command.

But how pitiful he, the officer, he actually was! It is true that the soldiers faith pushed him to assume the command and to make a savior decision!... But it is also true that, in fact, he was so weak, and only their faith in him made him so strong!... He was undecided, and only because he cared about his soldiers he finally was able to decide what was to do!... They, the soldiers, obeyed him unconditionally, with all their heart, with all the soul, with all their thought, and with all their power, so that he, the officer, offered them his own sacrifice because he couldn't do otherwise!... They were saved for they constituted, together, an ark, and only because they had faith in each other.

We think it was equally difficult to Noah, because we believe he doubted a lot about himself!...

Motto: “Cognoscere personam in iudicio non est bonum.”¹³

Awakening 1 – Guys, would you defend the printing house?

“Lieutenant, come here!”

He, the officer, he was just crossing the caserne’s plateau, and the chief of staff saw him and summoned him.

“Go to the company, take four soldiers, take whatever gear you think you need, and meet me here in a half an hour. Keep in mind to take with your enough ammunition!”

He executed that direct order and, after that half an hour passed, he reported to the chief of staff. There it was also a driver with a jeep, ready to go.

“Guys, would you defend the objective?”

This question made him, the officer, wondering. And suddenly he felt himself alone. It was a loneliness nothing could be compared to: that of being accountable for the other’s fate...

A fugitive shiver of fear suddenly crossed through his heart, but it rapidly vanished. There it wasn’t time for such things! The mission must be carried out!

The eyes of the soldiers were aiming at him.

“Get in the car!”

One soldier made the sign of the cross upon himself, sand he prayed:

“God, help us!”

Looking at that soldier, he, the officer, felt again that fear, but not so intensely.

He, the officer, wanted to do what that soldier did, a soldier he didn’t know who he was, and who offered himself voluntary for the mission. But he, the officer, felt shame because of the others. In the same time he felt spite because of this shame of his. His soul was fighting his own self, like he would have been trying to remember something he forgot long

¹³ Lat.: “It is not good, at judgment, to look at the face of the man.”

time ago, but which it always had belonged to him and which, unseen, it had always accompanied him.

He got in that car and sat next to the driver, and they started moving in a great speed. When getting through the gate of the caserne, he, the officer, thought:

“It could be for the last time!...”

And then he said, like for himself:

“God, if You are up there, please defend us!”

That soldier, who made on himself the sign of the cross before getting into the car, looked at him in a strange way...

Motto: “Mors est echo vitae.”¹⁴

Paradise 5 – Goldfinch

That autumn morning the grasses and the people were covered in a carpet of cold hoar-frost. The sun slipped off the cradle that usually carry it across the skies and over the world and it remained down, just above the earth, lonely and sad as his weak and red light which didn't succeed to defeat the cold.

He, the child, he was hurrying up together with the crowd of people, to catch that bus that was usually carrying him to the secondary grade school, in the nearby city. The giant poplar trees remained guarding the both sides of the road, but there were now leafless. Only here and there, a tiny ship of the skies, withered, and almost black because of loneliness, it was staying attached to the branch it grew up on, and it was refusing to leave for its only and last spiraled trip downwards.

He, the child, he was waken up from the semi-numbness he was in, by a splinter of flight that fell in the tall grass. He rushed there with his hunter instinct kicking in, and, in not time, he held in his hand a young goldfinch, beautifully colored, which, for no obvious reason, it couldn't fly. It couldn't or it didn't know?!...

His soul was engulfed by joy. That tiny and fragile creature he held in his fist, it was trying to escape him, but he hid it in his pocket as a great price pearl. And then he closed the zipper and placed his palm, protectively, above that tiny life.

Warmed up by the warmth the child's body was irradiating, the goldfinch started moving increasingly more, constantly trying to escape. So, he somehow found a hole and entered between the outer layer and the lining of the child's jacket, where, exhausted and believing that it had found a place to hide, it fell asleep.

¹⁴ Lat.: “Death is the echo of the life.”

During classes the child held that goldfinch carefully packed up in his jacket, without going out in pauses, and, from time to time, when the struggle for escaping of that goldfinch was becoming too noisy, he placed his hand on top of it, trying to calm it down. He, the child, was so happy of having that little living secret and that he was the only to know about it.

For how many times in our lives we are bodily and spiritually engaged in action which we think they are directed to protect something or somebody, but we instead keep that something or somebody as our prisoner, causing in the end - as we are going to show a little further - even its, his, or her death...

Arrived home, he, the child, he tried to extract the tiny creature from his jacket, but he didn't succeed because the goldfinch locked its claws on the jacket's fabric. Then he took a scissors and carefully severed the fabric...

Then he placed that tiny creature in a drawer, and the tiny creature hid itself in the farthest corner, amongst pens and notebooks.

The child went to had some lunch, and then turned back to check the state his goldfinch was in. Slowly, he pulled the drawer out, but it seemed the bird wasn't there. He pulled a little more and then, in a split second, the goldfinch threw itself towards the light coming from the window, but it bashed his head against the window glass and fell it down on the floor.

Instinctively, the cat the child didn't notice, it rushed like a lightning bolt and grabbed that bird by the head; in fact, the cat held the bird's head in its mouth, while trying to escape the room with the prey.

He ran after that cat, trying to take back the bird which was still flapping its wings... Then the cat bit the bird's neck and the bird died instantly.

He bitterly punished the cat, beating it and throwing it to the ground. Of course he thought that he was doing something good! That cat had killed the tiny he was trying to save...

Mixed feelings engulfed him immediately. He also loved his cat.

The most striking thing was, in the end, that despite his efforts, he couldn't save that bird and, he rather had caused its premature death.

He buried that goldfinch next to the trunk of the cherry tree he usually was climbing and staying there reading whatever book he had come across to.

Entire that adventure left him bewildered, and very, sad and suffocating with shame for all the things he did...

Motto: “Omne quod movetur ab alio movetur.”¹⁵

Banishing 4 – Regiment

“What don’t you let your colleague go home for?!... Are you from that city too?”

“No. But I talked to him before and he told me he didn’t want to go home. He told me he wanted to escape the tutelage of his family...”

He hadn’t had any clue what meant of the words his colleague told him! How comes: escaping your family’s tutelage?!...

He hadn’t had any kind of “family”. Not in the sense that he had no parent, or brothers, or sisters, of uncles, or aunts, or cousins, or grandparents... Not in that way... But in the way that he lost his father when he was two years old; and his mother worked all day long and she never was so close to him, advising him, participating to his life, guiding him... He had though, that grandmother of him, of a supra-human kindness, from whom he had never felt himself under any kind of tutelage...

Both graduated students, now officers, were in that room together with that colonel who was distributing the graduates to their future officer positions in the army.

“I am letting him choose first...” added he, the graduated officer.

His colleague said again:

“Colonel, sir, I do not want to be distributed to...!”

“But, my son, you better choose...”

It was futile. He, the officer, he learnt over the years that nobody could advise or could help anybody who doesn’t want to be advised or helped. Otherwise the Providence would be hindered by the human decisions... our sole decision is to choose between good and bad, on the measure we are aware of what the good and the bad are!...

¹⁵ Lat.: “Everything that moves, it is moved by something else (from outside it).”

“And you, my son, I think you will have better career perspective if you go to that chemical battalion...”

What could he, the freshly graduated officer, answer him?! Could he tell that colonel that he heard the commander of that battalion was a sadistic and mentally challenged guy, humiliating his officers in front of the soldiers they were commanding? Maybe that officer had to be released long time ago, from his commanding duties, but nobody bothered back then to consider the possibility of testing, psychologically, and if needed even psychiatrically, the command personnel, so that the craziest one was, the more the leadership of the army appreciated him... There was an odd and totally wrong opinion that, between being violent and cruel and offending the subordinates - and instilling discipline, there it would have been a correlation.

He, the freshly graduated officer was to learn over the years that, even if here and there the scientific leadership is being studied during diverse classes and on diverse levels, nobody bothers himself to apply the principles and the procedures he was taught of, but everybody rather thinks he knew better, and usually the vast majority of the leaders try to “solve themselves” – namely to feel and enjoy the power they temporarily have, and rarely one can meet a person who really tries to solve the problem.

In some pathological cases some leaders try to hinder the actions their subordinates undertake for solving the problem, because that problem offers the leaders the leverage of constant blaming their subordinates for that problem.

The graduation festivity came to an end quite quickly. They paraded in ceremonial uniform, and there it followed a lunch – organized and paid, according to the tradition, by the graduate officers. Parent, relatives, friends, were waiting for them behind the high fences surrounding the casern.

They, the graduates, were about to escape the School’s claws...

One by one, the fresh officers left the dinner hall and went to their companies in order to receive the written mission orders, the military travel tickets and the written assignment on the officer positions they were appointed to, scattered all over the motherland’s garrisons.

Participating to that graduation ceremony they hadn't even realized what had happened to them... They wore that officer uniforms and rank insignia of lieutenant, but it seemed to them that they remained the same... There was in front of them a short summer vacation – but this time was the last one – and they felt like they were going to come back to the school after a short staying with their families... they felt that, once the cold comes again, they will be reunited for another semester, for another year, for another period of being tormented...

As former chief of class he received a last direct order, which he didn't believe it in the first moments. The company's commander ordered them – the graduated officers – to go back to the dinner hall and to bring back to the company the tables and the chairs the brought there for the ceremony... Otherwise, he, the company commander, he was to delay their departure, by not distributing their documents, until they executed that order.

They took it as a joke, a last farce that captain, nicknamed "Snail" – because of his slowness and clumsiness, but also because of his almost total lack of any professional skills and knowledge, and also because of his almost absent communication skills – was trying to play on them.

From behind one could hear some curses. The thirty three Young Officers were experimenting diverse feelings, from amazement to mistrust, from amusement to hatred. That gesture was totally meaningless. They were asked a last sacrifice, but that sacrifice one was a totally futile one.

Finally, all their looks landed on him - the former chief of class. During the three years they live and suffered together in that school, that symbiosis formed amongst them, them who were speaking against the stupidity they were forced to live within, and him, the one being between the anvil of the commanders' orders and the sledge-hammer of his colleagues' resistance, even without they realizing it, it cemented a involuntary and almost unconscious need of his colleagues of asking him to decide on their behalf.

He understood the fact that that company commander just tried to cause another scandal, and that order was a pretext and given especially for not being executed, in order to

offer a pretext to discredit the young graduates even more. That revenge wasn't to change anything, because, that heinous satisfaction, that last offense, it didn't change anything regarding the "qualities" of the company's commander.

"Now I am showing you!" said that one, and disappeared in his chancellery.

"Let's get the damn tables and bring them back..." decided him, the former chief of class.

Some of the colleagues protested, but, when they saw the platoon left them behind, they hurried up to catch up with it. That was another proof that the army did a good job on them and welded them to that multi-human organism; that platoon still had the force of holding them prisoners in his being...

When the last table had been brought back, the company's commander came and handed over the documents. They defeated him again, by being humble again.

But, in the end, they hauled chairs and tables while dressed in the officer ceremony uniform, wearing the lieutenant insignia. Who will be able to ever erase that dishonoring of the quality of officer, recorded by the moment's eternity?

That vacation passed very quickly. They were asked to report to duty some two weeks earlier than usual.

The day of the presentation was a beautiful but hot day. Despite the fact that it was early September, the sun was burning.

At the gate of the Regiment he saw that he wasn't alone. Quite numerous groups of officers and non-commissioned officers were there, waiting impatiently to start their future.

In the first place, they were checked by the officer on duty on that day. Shortly after there came the commander of the Regiment, a rather short guy, a major, quite chubby, who, from time to time, he stuttered when speaking something more complicated; he usually spoke with some difficulty.

When speaking, he looked downwards, in the same time keeping his head leaned on the left side.

He, the Young Officer, he immediately "read" that guy, a weak one, whose tyrannical accesses were actually cries for help and defense reactions against some rather imaginary aggressions from the other people.

Regiment commander's first order was an abusive one, of course, because the commanders of all armies are habituated to be abusive when it is not expressly forbidden to them:

"Let them move into caserne! They have two hours time to do that!"

The new arrivals left towards the places where they stored their two trunks they had all their military belongings – mostly uniforms - the country endowed them with. Those huge trunks were really huge and they could have been hauled only by physically fit persons.

For accommodation they were appointed to use a dormitory from the so-called "Only officers and non-commissioned officer Battalion", namely a battalion that didn't have any conscript soldier. They kept only the command structure and they were prepared for being brought to the full strength with reserve soldiers, when the general or partial mobilization was declared. In other words: leisure life...

Because the freshly arrivals didn't know each other, and for there were almost thirty beds for twelve graduates, they chose to occupy "nests" a little isolated from each other. The only staying together were the infantry officers who were together in the officers military school.

One of the infantry officers was relatively old comparatively to the others. This one was quite precious and pedant and he wielded, as often as the occasion allowed him, some writing set composed of a fountain pen, a ballpoint pen, and a mechanical crayon, all of them kept together in an imitation of leather holster. All the pieces imitated the gold, being coated with a yellow and shining substance.

One day, while they were granted a pause for lunch, the graduates were surprised by the visit of the counter-espionage Regiment's officer, who came to execute a checking of all luggage they had there. This happened because their colleague reported that his writing set was stolen.

He, the Young Officer, felt himself offended. His intrinsic way of reasoning, of acting, and of behaving, it came once more in conflict with that stupid action he was submitted to.

That stupid "spy" proved to be totally unqualified for his job, and the fact he treated all the graduates as they would

have been criminals, said a whole lot about his intelligence and professional training.

When the spy toppled over his luggage and scattered its content on the bad, he, the Young Officer, looked the ‘spy’ deep in his eyes, and he asked him:

“Colonel, sir, do you believe that somebody would be so stupid than to steal something and hide it in the same dormitory with the loser, and even in its own luggage?!...”

Seemingly, that argument determined the end of the “inspection”. But there remained a bunch of unanswered questions...

Even on the first day of casern, they were summoned on the plateau where the Regiment’s commander was waiting for them. The commander assigned each of them to a so-called “mission”. Later he, the Young Officer, he would understand that those leaders had nothing prepared for them; they didn’t even know what to do with them. There was no program. There was not “internship” at all. There were only makeshift activities for nobody to say that nothing was done.

“Colonel, sir, you haven’t appointed me to any mission, sir.”

That stupid need of being framed in the general picture it kicked in again. He could have waited for the colonel to leave – that one was already leaving – and then he could have gone in the dormitory where to benefit of some leisure time. In the end, it wasn’t him to be blamed because he wasn’t assigned to anything...

Half turned towards him, the commander quickly improvised something – in fact, what could he do with a chemistry officer?! What had he known about what a chemistry officer means?! – And, from the “height” of his small stature he ordered him:

“Go and check the state of the fact of the Regiment’s agricultural premises. Tomorrow you are going to report an exact evaluation of it.”

What did he know, a young chemistry officer, about what “agricultural premises” mean? – Nothing at all. As he didn’t know, also, nothing, for instance, about surgical removing an appendix, or about building rockets... The

“chemistry” he had thought he had prepared himself for, it seemed to be totally different in the real life...

He took a notebook, a pen, and, as he was, in that new uniform, wearing shiny tall boots, he started asking for directions, because nobody told him where the Regiment’s agricultural premises were...

It took him almost a half an hour of walking, because the surface of the caserne it was huge. He left the Regiment exiting the “gate number two” – by the way, the regulations required him to have a mission order, or at least a written permit for leaving the caserne, but nobody asked him anything when crossing through that gate that was guarded by military music personnel. As he followed to find out, usually, the front gates are heavily guarded and the access through them it is submitted to a strict control, but all the other gates of a military premise can be actually penetrated with much ease. But, no spy can count on that, because, also as a unwritten rule, you can be questioned randomly, on a whim, just because on that day the non-commissioned officer guarding that gate, he was in a bad mood...

He, the Young Officer, he finally arrived to that “cave” where the “headquarters” of the agricultural premises were. “Cave”: because those spaces were really caves, namely some spaces of twenty meters long, six meters wide, and eight meters height; those caves were everywhere in the walls of that seventeen century stronghold the Regiment was dislocated in. Some of the caves were dinner halls, others were storage units, others were classrooms, and others were used to breed pigs, sheep, chickens... The initial use of those caves it was to shelter the horses the army of the seventy century had. The worst situation was that of the caves where the dinner halls were, because during each summer, the horse urine impregnated in the soil, it stunk so badly that it was almost impossible to the soldiers to eat inside...

A totally unaware soldier came out of one of the caves. If that soldier saw him, that soldier would disappear, of course... But now, it was too late. Though, the body language of that soldier showed that, in the first moments, that soldier still wanted to flee...

“You, come here!”

He, the young chemistry officer, he used all his military knowledge, from standing still when commanding, to the use of an assertive voice and to adopting a “commanding” attitude.

That soldier, still hesitating, came as he was, wearing a filthy uniform, stained with all sort of substance, from food to animal dejections.

“I am lieutenant... Where the chief of the agricultural premises is?”

“...”

“Answer me, soldier!”

That poor soldier was struggling to understand where this collision of the worlds was coming from, and why he, of all the soldiers from the world, was caught in the middle...

“Um... he doesn’t come so early... usually he comes around eleven... if he comes...”

He, the Young Officer, he wondered how it was that possible, that a non-commissioned officer to come at work at his own will... But how many things was him, the Young Officer, to experience and suffer until understanding that the real life isn’t at all like the provisions of the military regulations specify, and the law – as he was to convince himself later – it isn’t the same for everybody, despite the fact that, declaratively, all the people are equal in front of the law, because there still are some people who are “more equal” than others!...

“Let’s start counting the animals! I’m assigned here, by the Regiment’s commander himself, to do a general inspection” the Young Officer ordered.

That was the moment that soldier really started to panic! What on earth it was with the Regiment’s commander?!... Did somebody forget to provide the usual bribe in meat, milk, cheese, wine, and brandy? That mobster soldier – for he was involved in the general mob and he knew all the “secrets” concerning the bribe and stealing “operations” in place – panicked just because of that! What on earth it was the matter with the mobster-in-chief? What were the mechanisms triggering that revenge, because that soldier was convinced that that “inspection” was searching for motives and for the victims to be punished for...

Involved in the bribe operations, that kind of soldiers and of non-commissioned officers, they no longer paid respect to any officer because of their rank, but only to those who had power of decision in order to influence their way of living. And whom, of course, they paid more than respect!... The rest of the officers were treated with some kind of familiarity and disrespect destined to show them that they are dealing with a person "with strong and high-placed relationships".

If the chief of the agricultural premises was to be relieved from his position and replaced – consequently to the "already known result of the inspection" –, they all, the former mob structure was to be appointed back to their military units where they were to be submitted, like any "normal" soldier, to the activities of the military training. That meant: no more leaving, no more drinking, no more eating whatever you want and whenever you want, and also: cleaning, wearing armament, efforts, obeying the rules...

That soldier behaved like he could flee in any moment. Wherefrom that thought came, he, the Young Officer, he didn't know. But, he told that soldier:

"Come on, behave yourself nicely! Tell me everything! It seems that I have been sent here for I will be the new chief of the agricultural premises... Would you want to be appointed here a chief who is already upset with you?!..."

The surprise that soldier had it was a total one. Indeed, there was an officer position, back then unoccupied. So, having nothing to lose in the new circumstances, and having the guaranty that by doing so, he will be protected by his new master, that soldier totally changed. A servile smile flourished on his lips, increasingly wider.

"Lieutenant sir! Would you want to eat or drink something before performing your inspection?"

"We'll see! If everything goes well, if I feel that I can trust you, maybe..."

Of course he was playing with that soldier and he actually only tried to fulfill the order he received, and nothing more. He knew what the danger of letting yourself to be corrupted - even with something totally unimportant - it poses regarding your authority. Once paid, you are no longer in the position of commanding the man who paid. The payer gains a

“moral” superiority upon you. Rather he is the one commanding you!

“Here we have the nutria.”

“How many do you have here?”

“Around thirty...” the soldier tried to find a number to put on, wondering about such an “odd” question...

“How many chickens do you have here?”

“I do not know... You know, sometimes the foxes steal some... But, I would say, around a hundred, maybe...”

“Sheep?”

“More than two hundreds...”

“Pigs?”

“I do not know... the current chief brought some of them yesterday, while I was harvesting fodder beet.”

“And how comes that all of them seem to not being more that four or five months old?”

Wondering about such a naivety, but still willing to please his future boos, the soldier answered that question saying:

“Here is the trick: immediately when a pig gains around a hundred kilograms in weight, the current boss takes it away and he brings back another one, a young and small one. The number is the same, but the difference consists in meat. He tell everybody that, because of the humidity and cold from the cave, the pigs all ill at their lungs and, despite they eat a lot, they do not gain in weight...”

While they were carrying on the inspection, the other soldiers hurried to make a phone call and to announce their chief about what was going on. That one appeared, in running, sweating and gasping for air – he was disgustingly fat! – wearing an “approximate” and stained and greasy uniform.

“What are you doing here?!...” Asked that non-commissioned officer, wanting to behave authoritatively, in order to gain the psychological advantage.

“Present yourself, report according to the regulations, and then I will inform you about my mission here!”

That one seemed like he received a fist in the jaw... he usually called the superior officers, even the generals, on their first name. That insolence of the Young Officer, and that frond attitude – as he considered it – unbalanced him and he

immediately thought that he had upset somebody in a high place and he was to be replaced...

"You have no animals' official accounts here, have you? I am going to inform the Regiment's commander immediately about the lack of order from here."

"Lieutenant, sir, please come to my office! I'm sure that we can find a solution to that. I know that a little package with some beef it wouldn't harm anybody?"

"It couldn't be, by any means! Now I have to report even a bribing attempt!"

When he, the Young Officer, he arrived to the Regiment's commander's office, that one was already informed – rather misinformed – and "mounted".

"What have you been doing at the agricultural premises?!..."

"Colonel, sir, you ordered me this morning to perform an inspection there and to inform you with the results..."

The major had red eyes, and not because of tiredness... He tried to remember what he said in that morning, but there was nothing he could remember.

In order to get out from that embarrassing situation, the commander asked him:

"And what have you found there?"

"In short: there is disorder, there is chaos; they don't even know how many animals they have there. The chief wasn't at work and when arriving he tried to bribe me. It seemed also that he was already drunk at eleventh hour in the morning!"

"I see... I am going to take action and punish him! Dismissed!..."

During the following two weeks he, the Young Officer, received no other tasks. He was simply ignored. So that he had the necessary time to wander through all the hidden corners of that stronghold.

Despite the interdiction – because the atheistic communist regime and also because of the imminent danger of collapse – the first objective he visited it was that Catholic church, from the center of the stronghold, right in the middle of the Regiment's heart.

Church's nave was flanked by two floors buildings, initially destined to shelter the monks living there. The late

Gothic architecture had quite beautiful stucco works, but almost all of them had been destroyed by the Russian militaries while the Romania was occupied by them and a Russian regiment was dislocated in that stronghold.

Over years, the trash thrown there it filled up both the dungeon and the first floor's rooms. In order to get into that Church you had to climb on top of heaps of garbage... You had to pass through that gruesome initiation of crawling over that garbage and then, once arrived inside the Church, an angelic perspective opened to you. Once there you felt yourself pulled out of time and sunk in eternity.

From time to time, cleaning campaigns started impetuously, wanting to clean up that mess and to open the way for access inside the Church, but all those campaigns failed as majestically as they started. The ants-soldiers, despite the threats, the shouting out, even the beating, they weren't able to remove the barrier that misery constituted between the outside world and the Church's inside.

It seemed also that, somehow, a curse was defending that Church, as for avoiding the situation when, during the Soviet occupation, the Church's building was desecrated by transforming in a giant class room where the Soviet soldiers were taught the doctrine of the dialectical-materialism and of the atheism, and they were taught that there is no God.

Actually, those campaigns were doomed from start, because nobody thought at where all that garbage was to be deposited, and, on the other hand, nobody knew the real quantitative dimensions such an undertaking required. Even though those days the "ecological approach" it wasn't invented yet, and you could actually throw garbage everywhere, the transportation needs was huge and nobody had fuel not even for the daily needs.

Somebody came with the idea of manufacturing some blinds and to place them over the doors and the windows so than two objectives could have been achieved by doing that: the access in the Church would have become impossible and, in the same time, the trash would have been hidden and impossible to see. That idea was put in place, and since then the Church was protected even more. It remained the gruesome

smell that fermenting garbage emitted during that summer and autumn.

All the blinds disappeared the following winter though, because the fire wood quota allotted to the militaries was totally insufficient, so that they gradually stole the blinds and burnt them up in the stoves, in order to warm up during the cold nights. The stealing started from that part situated behind the Church, and it gradually advanced towards the front. When noticed, there was almost nothing to be saved.

While entering that side building, he, the Young Officer, he wondered, in the first place, about the tomb silence that it was inside. It seemed that he entered in a spatial-temporal continuum, wherefore all the people vanished. The leviathan within whose body the Young Officer was, like a new and also perpetual Jonah, it seemed communicating him a secret knowledge about life and offering him that divine peace.

Half disintegrated and covered in dampness plaster work, it was also covered in Cyrillic inscriptions left there by the Soviet soldiers in an obsolete era. Those materialistic signs only reached the height of a human stature and they never went up above that height. All above them there remained the true dialectic of the symbols of the faith.

He saw that, where the icon of Christ the Pantocrator was to be, the ceiling collapsed and through that opening the sun was shining brightly. There was so much beauty than he somehow was transported in the world from above. A dove flew through that opening in the ceiling and, followed by the sunrays, it landed on the shoulder of a stucco work representing a saint, and stood there watching him.

Those giant wooden beams sustaining the huge ceiling gave up and collapsed, the icon painted by human hands was destroyed, but, above Church, there still remained the sun, the sky, the light, like a sign that even the Church would disappear, God still lasts forever.

Church's spirit had moved, long time ago, back in heavens from where it came, leaving behind the image of that little that the human power can do.

That citadel had the walls shaped in a star like form, having its corners specially built like some arrow heads, having the purpose of channeling the attackers in small flows which to

be easily destroyed. If that citadel had been already built up when the project started, it would have been inexpugnable. But, when it actually had been built up, the artillery was able to destroy it. People can only struggle in their time, but there is also a reality above the time which escapes the man's will and efforts.

All the citadel's walls contained that type of caves, but not all the caves were used for something. Some of them had not been visited by anybody for tens of years. He the Young Officer, he explored almost all of them; not all, because there were caves beyond his reach. Everywhere on the floor there was a thick layer of thin, whitish-grayish dust, raised up by the simple trampling or even by the current of air somebody stirred up by walking. That dust simply stuck to his boots and to his clothes.

Here and there, in the external parts of the galleries a few sunrays penetrate the darkness. But the caves going deep in the walls were totally sunk in an impenetrable and quite scary dark.

When exploring those caves, he felt a slight sensation of fear, but also an immense loneliness, both of them combined with the pleasant feeling of exploring the unknown.

He had this revelation that the eternity is not a theoretical notion, or something hidden somewhere, but it is "hidden in plain sight". One could have seen the eternity after his spiritual eyes had been opened. But this eternity isn't something material, ore something having a shape or a consistence which could be felt with the five senses; the eternity is rather an inconceivable with the human mind thing, a thing that rather can express by expressing the impossibility of expressing it. The eternity can be described only apophatically, but, despite this, one can feel it in a feeling above any feeling.

That gallery started descending in a slight slope towards that dark end. He continues advancing using a flashlight, until his going ahead was blocked by a wall.

Stories about galleries crossing on beneath the nearby river and leading all the way to the center of the nearby city were circulating at that time. There were even stories telling about galleries penetrating under other galleries, a maze of

unknown, equally dangerous in case of getting lost in it as it was mysterious.

That wall blocking his advancement was probably erected there by the soviets, in their attempt to deny the access or the hypothetical spies or saboteurs trying to attack the soviet occupation army.

Not so much until then, but later in his life, he will meet all sorts of walls which were blocking his advancement in unknown, but, as he will find out in the end, the main wall impeding, it him had been, all the time, himself.

During his roving all over the outer walls of the citadel he discovered the secret paths the soldier could escape on, at any hour in the day or in the night. They even carved stairs in the bricks and in the stones the builders had used to construct the sharp corners of those giant walls. Fugitives' paths were crossing through some thickets formed of wild roses and hawthorn, which at a first glance seemed to be impassable. Those little jungles grew on the soil the builders of the citadel had used for covering and filling up the upper space of the walls. This was because the walls weren't made of bricks and stones in their whole thickness, but they were conceived like boxes filled up with soil.

When one knew those paths, escaping the military unit or penetrating it was like a walk in a park. He wondered again how easily those great and menacing walls could have been penetrated by knowing the secret passages. And also, how easy could have been if somebody had taught you the paths over those walls and how dangerous was for the first to search for the ways of escaping by their own. The spiritual life poses the same dangers of falling off the walls or the heights you want to cross over or to climb. Even worse, if a blind drives you, "both will fall in the pit".

He was appointed to a mixed company, uniting platoons of the following military specialties: infantry intelligence, communications, engineers, and NBRC intelligence – where he was the platoon's commander. He received six jeeps, three of them old and in state of preservation, and three of them newer, but still old. He received only six soldiers, because the fact that that platoon was manned up and had a commander it was an absolute novelty.

His first care was to perform an inventory, in order to count and ascertain the existence of the materials those special vehicles were endowed with; and then to put them in running conditions, for they weren't running for a quite long period of time, counted in years.

That type of vehicles didn't do the mechanics' life easier. In time, some sort of operational procedure had been crystallized in order to start their engines. The pipe of the air filter was to be removed and, while one driver turned the starter, another was placing a stick having at its end a rag soaked in diesel and burning. The flame was aspirate through the air intake and replaced the incandescent spark plug destined to warm up the diesel. Finally, after turning the engine for at least a quarter an hour and after filling that cave up with a white and greasy smoke, a black smoke followed and the engine started trembling of all bolts and nuts.

Unlike the diesel jeeps, the older ones had engines running on petrol. Even though, in years, the petrol from their tanks hadn't been changed ever, they started at the first key and they were running so smooth, purring like some green cats, almost imperceptible.

His paramount worry, cultivated during his whole military career, it was that of not being stolen. So that, on that occasion too, when receiving that long and semi-obscure cave the six vehicles were in, his first care was to strengthen the locking system. At that time one could not buy almost anything from the stores, and I mean even the goods for general use and for daily basic necessities, like food or soap, not to mention others. That city was fortunate for being close to the border and the contraband was providing its flea market with all sorts of stuff, but the prices were very high, because there was a monopoly. He bought from there a padlock, a half of meter of chain, and some nails, and with those materials he did the best he could.

But he knew all those weak measures he took were impeding only the "honest" people from stealing, because the "professionals" could always find a way to steal from you. So, he decided to hide the tool sets each new jeep was endowed with, in the older jeeps, which seemed to have nothing on them, because even the detection devices were removed long

time ago. So, if somebody came with the intention to steal those desirable tools sets, he wouldn't find them at their places, but he also wouldn't think that they had been moved on the other jeeps.

It was impossible to him to remove from himself that worry about the material things. If you missed something, if something was stolen from you, if you destroyed something even unintentionally, you would pay for that and, according to an arbitrary decision the administrative inquiry commission would have taken, you were forced to pay for those material objects out of your salary. That decision was arbitrary because they also could find you not guilty, and that loss would have been extinguished by being covered from the state budget. It was also arbitrary because, depending of the conditions they would have taken in consideration, you could pay a certain percent of that item's value, or a price including even a penalty and because of that that prices was more than one hundred percent the original price, even reaching at one hundred and fifty percents.

A phenomenon of obvious wasting was those so-called "getting out of use", when, on numerous occasions, quite new goods were destroyed. It was about all sorts of material the army had, from equipment to vehicles – though, in the case of the last ones such operations took place very rarely, only in very limited cases, and, usually, the army vehicles were jalopies, dangerous to use, and, in case of war, of low efficiency. There were almost no spare parts to repair anything, from vehicles to communications means and to boots. By the way, the soldiers were wearing almost perished boots, with no heels, and brand new boots were cut with an ax in order to be "removed from use". Or, almost all the petrol cans in use were corroded heavily and almost all of them were leaking fuel if loaded with, but the same materials, in pristine conditions, were pierced with an pickax, for the same "reason" (?!...).

On one occasion he, the Young Officer, he asked for such a fuel canister that was already pierced. Before asking for it, he witnessed how the soldier performing that destructive action of piercing it with the pickax was struggling to do that. In case of all the other canisters, it was enough of hitting it once, and the pickax crossed through both sides. But in that

particular case, the canister refused to give up easily. After a few repeated hits, there occurred only a dent, and that soldier renounced and passed forwards.

He, the Young Officer, he was given that fuel canister in exchange with the promise of providing a few bears to the chief of that "removal from service" action. At a first glance that canister seemed to not differ from the others from there. But at a closer look, it was obviously thicker, made of a different alloy, and almost twice heavier. He was impressed by its stubbornness in not giving up, and that was the only motif he wanted to have it for. After taking it, he paid not too much attention to it. The canister ended to be stored in the classroom of the NBRC platoon, unnoticed and unused.

One day, the counterintelligence officer appeared at the door of that classroom and asked for seeing that fuel canister. He, the Young Officer, almost forgot about it. A soldier "remembered" where that canister was and brought it to them, in front of the classroom.

"You are giving me this canister, as a present, aren't you?"

"Of course, colonel, sir..." answered him, totally bewildered.

The counterintelligence officer took that canister and left saying nothing more. While he was at approximately twelve meters from the Young Officer, he turned that canister's left side so that the former owner could see the indented inscription that said: *Wermacht...*

Evil things cede hard, and they perpetuate their existence in unimaginable places, where they are silently and secretly lasting their reality within history. One must pay constant attention because everybody is in danger of using forbidden and condemned symbols, even unknowingly and unwittingly. The guilt is the same, but it is still evaluated by people. Some of them could sentence you to death, some others could save you. It depends on your neighbor. But, also, the blame of making bad decisions affecting you, it would be cast on him, not on you.

In that fatidic year of '89, starting from early spring and continuing to the winter, control commission after control commission were coming one after another. The unheard of

thing it was that, after the highest echelon's commission – namely from the Ministry of Defense – finished its inspection, after the commissions from the division and from the army levels had already inspected the Regiment, the commission from the division level came and started a new inspection. “Weren't they sure that their hierarchical level knew what they were doing?!...” it was the question everybody asked as a good joke... or: “These guys no longer verify us, but they started verifying each other!”

Two weeks on inspection were followed by two weeks of so-called “remedial”, namely to solve the ascertained problems. But, if the commission found you having the vehicles batteries not working, the next commission found you in the same situation, for nobody had any spare parts for providing you. The commissions wrote a concluding document, in some cases recommended to be some officers punished, but that was all. Those commissions had no real power to solve things. Their only real power was to stress people to death! You were constantly blamed with things not depending on you to be solved...

And who could they blame you and punish you for things they already knew as impossible to solve?!...

For instance, the technical officer from the division level, who was the one to distribute you batteries for vehicles, but he hadn't any and he knew that very well, and he still proposed you to be punished because you have no batteries in functioning order for your vehicles... This thoroughly illustrates, as an endless list of other things, the absurdity a totalitarian regime - especially the communism - it gives birth to...

The Regiment's militaries no longer undertook any training activities. All they were doing was to answer to the questions the inspection commissions asked them to, to presents endlessly the same poverty and shortcoming they were blames for without being guilty by any means, and to resist the pressure they were constantly and so strongly submitted to.

Inspection commissions' program was inexistent. Their program was their own will. After that succession of inspections nothing remained unknown – it wasn't anything

unknown even before those inspections!... So that, the commissions' members, not having anywhere to go for two long weeks, and being also bored by continuously checking things they already knew about, they remained in the caserne until late in the night, drinking, eating, and feasting. Those feasts were supplied with the necessary things from the agricultural premises the Regiment had, or they were "sponsored" by wealthy parents in exchange of their children's long and often leave...

Of course that all of that were illegal! Of course that all those things meant deep and generalized corruption! Howe could, for instance, the chief of the logistics to verify if his subordinates steal food, if he was drinking and eating stolen drinks and foods, together with those subordinates?!. .

But, at that time, everything seemed normal... The general perception and education was not condemning, but formally, such things. There is, in all societies, the danger of letting yourself to be corrupted. While you are the one affected by corruption you condemn the corrupted people, but once being in the position of being bribed, of benefitting of corruption, your vision gets changed. And, if in the beginning you manifest some shame and resistance while being bribed, after a while you start demanding it...

Officers and non-commissioned officers were usually gathering together, a few after the normal working program passed, in places next to the buildings, places which couldn't be seen from the central headquarter where the commission was feasting. They formed a crowd of men, tired, exhausted, hungry, and angry, and forgotten by the commission. Or, maybe the commission knew very well what they were doing, namely they intentionally wanted to keep the personnel in a groggy state, in order not to adhere to what the counterespionage knew that was coming...

It must be said here that, at that time, there was no possibility for instance to buy food from anywhere. The Regiment had no grocery store to offer the possibility to buy something to eat. If the regulations had been respected, they would have been enlisted to be provided with food by the unit's logistic, but for that was necessary a written official order. Being only an abuse, nobody issued such an order. Not

to mention that the Regiment's storage units didn't have the necessary quantity of food in order to do that, because of the general shortcomings all over the society.

They were only staying there, even without talking to each other, only almost continuously cursing. Of course, when the night fell, in the first days, still thinking that the commission or the commander only forgot to give the personnel the order to go home, they asked for the permission to leave. They were answered they cannot leave, because: "what if a member of the commission needs somebody of them?" They must wait "until new orders will be issued".

Some of them, more courageous – one could say unruly... – left for home without asking permission. The commission's strategy – if there was one... – (he, the Young Officer followed to ascertain during his entire career regarding the makeshift taken measures) caused the opposite and, instead of increasing the control upon the personnel it rather affected the troupes' moral and caused indiscipline. Pushing somebody beyond the supportability limits it always has unwanted consequences. There is the rule of the middle path – the kingly path – that always works, even in the ascetic efforts.

Arrived home, they had only a few hours to rest before being summoned again, very early in the morning, to come to the Regiment, because a state of alarm was issued.

Almost never one could present to the duty in the allotted time. It was obvious to everybody that, even to an elementary calculation, the result couldn't have been right.

There were almost no telephones in the personnel's houses – only a few of them had that "luxury" back then. This was because the city had only an outdated telephonic central to serve all the citizens. All the communications were done through physical wires. There were a limited number of physical positions to be connected in that telephonic central. So that, for instance, a makeshift solution it was to obtain the acceptance of a neighbor, to be connected to the same line. But there was the inconvenience that, when one was called, both of them picked up the phone, and both of them could listen to that communication. And some of them did it...

Another makeshift solution, but which caused a great deal of discomfort, was to disconnect a not so important person

and to give that line to a new beneficiary. One could easily imagine the negative publicity such an action caused it to the military...

The ultimate solution for summoning the personnel when an alarm was issued, it was that of sending soldiers as alarm agents, on foot, to the personnel homes. The poor soldiers, in an unknown city, running as quickly as they could, and usually getting lost amongst the apartments blocks – because the personnel was living all over the city –, carrying on their back a submachine gun without ammunition, sweating because of effort, trying to remember the password they were given, gasping for air when talking to somebody, not knowing – because it was impossible to keep the list they had up to date – if they had to insist more at that door, because it was their responsibility to announce that personnel, or to leave it and hurry up to the next destination mentioned in the list they had, striving to find that destination...

He, the Young Officer, always wondered how came that, such high ranks of military commanders and chiefs, they never thought at that as being a possibility of losing armament, of being that armament stolen by malefactor groups, because the soldiers weren't given any ammunition to defend themselves. And, if so, why didn't they issue an order to not send the alarm agents with armament, a fact that would have given them the possibility of running quicker, because that submachine gun was quite heavy and uncomfortable when carried on the back with that leather stripe cutting down between your neck and your shoulder, right upon the clavicle...

There were entire new neighborhoods without even one telephonic line. It is in that country like a unwritten rule, like a tradition, to build up without providing from the start the necessary infrastructure, and then to continuously dig an adding improvised and temporary and, after a little while, totally overwhelmed solutions. One must know that, any advancement, even in the spiritual domain, it must have a solid base, because otherwise the higher things achieved could bring rather sufferance than joy.

So that, in the given conditions – one could say it was almost planned to be like that – the arrival time couldn't have been maintained in the specified parameters by any means. It

was like hammering a nail in the sole of your boot and then to ask why your foot is hurting you...

Buying a personal car back then it was a generation's effort. Parent and children and grandparents were saving money for buy one. A car was as expensive as a house was. The people could buy only cars produced in the country, and even so, for instance, buying a terrain vehicle required a special approval from the highest communist party's levels.

There were no possibilities of any kind of credit. So, for a young military, the only possibility to have a car was to be provided with it by his parents.

If you had the money, you would deposit it in an account and, after four years in average – of course the party leaders were being served quicker... -, of waiting for the already bought car, you were summoned to get it from the factory. There, at the factory, the workers taking advantage of the situation, they postponed you for a few days, and, desperate to get your car, you accepted any car, even in the worst conditions possible, even if the tires weren't knew, even if the tools kit wasn't there – and you know that you couldn't buy another from anywhere -, even if the doors weren't shut properly, or even if the rust was already visible...

Even worst, the number of taxi cabs was totally insufficient even for the regular needs, and, they didn't come when asked from public telephones. (We hope the reader can imagine that back then the Internet and the mobile phones weren't invented yet – this happened after almost a decade....)

Consequently, in case of an alarm was issued, the personnel who were announced quickly put the uniform on and left, as quickly as they could, for presenting to the Regiment. In the night, like haunting phantoms, the personnel were running towards the caserne. In the silence of the night their boots sounded like a cavalcade. The streets were never lightened – for the state's savings program was so tight – and you must avoid, sometimes in a total darkness, to fall in a pit, as to a few of them it even happened. The total situation back then was that of a blind leadership leading a blind people, falling both of them in the pit of destruction.

The older personnel , in some extent immune to the critique the command and the party chief followed to address

them, walked slowly, smoking and cursing... they were already tardy. And it was not their fault. Sometimes the alarm agent arrived after the time the personnel must already be present to the caserne, it already expired. After that, no matter how quickly you arrived to the Regiment, you were in the same trouble.

The younger personnel, terrified by the perspective of being punished with arresting days – to the younger ones the custom was to give harsher punishments in order to somehow control also the older personnel by being threatened that that could happen even to them -, they were running as quickly as they could, because they were trying – in an absurd manner, because, no matter how quickly you are running, you cannot turn yourself back in time – to somehow escape the punishment.

“Tell me, lieutenant, why are you late?”

The personnel, gathered in the big conference room, they were being held accountable because they arrival to the alarm was late.

“Colonel, sir, the agent came too late...”

“I don’t care about that! It is everybody’s duty and obligation to take all the necessary measures in order to be announced in time! I am going to punish you!”

But that far bang interrupted everything. They all knew that that sound was the sound made by a submachine gun when fired.

The whole command ran towards the place the bang was heard from. The personnel remained staying there without any order to carry on. So that, after waiting almost an hour to be told what to do, the personnel left.

Later on, they all found out what happened. A sentinel shot himself in the head, spreading his brains everywhere around on a few meters radius, on the guard position’s pavilion, and on the tall grass from around that it was about to be mowed. Later in the capitalist era, a song was circulating, having the following lyrics: “I will shot myself in the head / And

I will make a hole there / In order to see the world through it /
In another aura”¹⁶.

Due to the too prolonged process of being terrorized through inspections the Regiment’s personnel were submitted to, they didn’t even react to the even higher oppression they were subjected to by the commission that came to investigate the case of that suicidal. The soldier who committed suicide left behind a farewell letter, vaguely accusing everybody, but also accusing his girl friend... Nobody cared any longer even for the military prosecutors’ threats...

No psychological assistance was in place back then. The soldiers were given guns and ammunition and they were appointed on duty, in the guard posts surrounding the caserne. Weapons, ammunition, and mental issues, behold the recipe for a tragedy waiting for happen.

Rumors were that, on the occasion of the national day’s feast from that year, in a historical building’s tower, at the firing distance from the place where Ceausescu was to hold a speech, there were discovered by the security services, some ammunition rounds and an old machinegun from WWII. That weapon, of German provenance, it was perfectly functional and ready to be fired. The conclusion was the Great Leader followed to be attacked and possibly killed.

Since then, the measures in place for controlling the ammunition and the weapons became even more drastic. Not even the shell of a fired ammunition round must be lacking after any firing exercise. Not to say that a live ammunition round that was missing, it was considered of such an importance that it must be reported hierarchically no later than an hour from the moment it was discovered. If the unity’s commanders failed to report such an event in the given time, they would have been released from their positions and replaced.

All dictators from history, when a real war is absent, they wage war against their own people, and especially against their army. They also try to cause wars or dangers addressed to their own people in order to justify their dictatorship and they

¹⁶ These lyrics were quoted from the song named “Drunkenness”, belonging to the Vama Veche Band.

abuses and crimes by telling the people they are its saviors. When somebody resists them, the totalitarian regimes immediately qualify that person as people's enemy and subject him to all kind of persecutions in the name of the people.

One night he, the Young Officer, he was on duty as commander of the Regiment's guard. The officer on duty on the whole Regiment appeared and ordered:

"Alarm!"

There were provisions in the regulation book regarding the guarding service, what activities must be done when an alarms is issued. The stages were ascending from simply going out in the front of the building and waiting there for being counted and checked, to the highest level that meaning distributing the ammunition and doubling the already existing sentinels and also putting in place sentinel positions which were not functioning in a usual situation.

He, the Young Officer, he asked for clarifications, namely in what situation they were. That captain, maybe in order to hide the fact that he didn't know anything about the regulations' provisions, he shouted out louder some unintelligible order. He, the Young Officer, he asked for the second time if he must distribute the ammunition or not. The captain shouted out even louder that yes, he ordered the ammunition to be distributed.

That masquerade of alarm passed, and the soldiers came back to the guard's building, where the armament was unloaded and the ammunition was taken back. Maybe the divine inspiration determined him to execute that operation in person. The regulation let the possibility for that operation to be carried on by the deputy commander of the guard, usually a sergeant. But, even very tired because he didn't sleep at all that night, he, the Young Officer, was driven by a force from above and he did that personally.

The ammunition was distributed in loaders one containing twenty five round and the other one containing only five. If a loader contained the whole quantity of ammunition that can be loaded in it, that fact could be inspected by checking the specially destined whole, through which one could see the back of a cartridge. In the given situation despite you could see all five rounds in the second loader, it was

impossible to tell how many rounds were in the first loader. But there was a trick: the round were held in a loader almost parallel, so that in case of odd number the first round was on the left, and in case of even numbers the first round was on the right.

He, the Young Officer applied that trick and, when it was that soldier's turn to be checked, the cartridges' positions were inversed in both loaders. Both loaders were unloaded and he, the Young Officer, he ascertained that there were missing six rounds. He immediately asked that soldier about what happened. That one reported that he was playing with the submachine gun and, because of not being sufficiently trained, and because of being night he didn't realize that when the lever is pulled back, a cartridge is ejected... He repeated that move for six times, not being aware of losing any ammunition.

He, the Young Officer, had no choice and reported immediately to the officer on duty on the whole Regiment. That one immediately reported to the Regiment's commander.

That one arrived in a half of an hour, drowsy of sleep deprivation and of alcohol, and searching for an escape goat.

"Who the fuck told you, imbecile, to distribute the ammunition?!..."

"Colonel, sir, the officer on duty on the Regiment told me that, at my express question..."

"Commander, I didn't tell him such a thing..." tried that lousy and coward officer to lie...

"Do you have any children?" the commander asked the Young Officer.

"Yes sir, a have a two months old daughter..."

"Be prepared for everything; you will probably be arrested..."

"But, sir, what am I accused for?!..."

The event was reported immediately to the Ministry of Defense and extensive and exhaustive searching was ordered. The whole number of Regiment's soldiers searched every square inch in order to find that cursed ammunition. Nobody could find anything, despite all those gigantic efforts.

Things were gradually deflating. The soldier in cause was a know local football player; his brother was a captain in the same Regiment – even if there was in place an order

forbidding the relatives to do the service in the same military unit!; the officer on duty on the Regiment had very high placed relations... the only one defended only by God was him, the Young Officer, who had nobody else to count on. If there was somebody to be accused, there it certainly was him.

The mentioned persons did everything in order to escape their skins, even if for that they had to save him.

“We have found the missing ammunition...”

It surely was a lie! One day the soldier’s brother came to him and said him:

“Lieutenant, don’t you know that, when a firing exercise takes place, you have to figure out how to “spare” a few rounds for cases like that...”

“I understood, sir!”

Motto: “Viva dox docet.”¹⁷

Ark 3 – “Voice of God, not of man”

What deserted, what lonely in front of the life he felt himself when, in that night, he unexpectedly received the order that assigned him to a newly founded Battalion, dislocated at approximately sixty kilometers from the city where he was living.

That despair state couldn't be expressed in words. He escaped with his life the recent Revolution. After those cloudy months, there followed the aggressive rumors, crafted in the laboratories of all sorts of manipulators: the menacing “safety state” from before it was replaced for a general lacking of rules that cause a total insecurity feeling. To all of those it was added that unnatural relocation of personnel, against everybody's will, that came to unbalance the last reserve of normality he, the Young Officer, was left with: the safety of the job...

His wife, together with whom, they was barely succeeding to get in time to the kindergarten to leave their daughter there in the morning and then to run toward the work places they had, she endured quite well the shock of the novelty regarding his relocation. Actually, both of them didn't realize at that moment, how deeply that new reality was to affect them.

Again he felt that strange sensation of being an orphan, and that it was because he was brutally cut off from the Regiment's body; the worst thing that could happen to a military is to get lost from his unity, from his colleagues. All the energetic fluxes pass from bottom to top and from top to bottom through each of the men composing a military subunit or a unit. The army, in order to achieve that unity, it does what it has been doing from ever: it levels the individual, it takes control upon him, and it pours him in the supra-individual mold of the military organization – this process being called “constituting the military units and subunits”.

¹⁷ “The living word teaches you.”

In that apartment situated at the upper floor, he was walking back and forward, worried about the consequences the order he received it had. On the eastern wall they had a library, the books of which he gathered together with his wife. They filled that library up, for his passion, from ever, it was the books. Moving away from his parents' home the only thing he brought with him were the books he bought over years...

He stopped in front of the books. He had read almost all of them. It was so easy to him, to escape each time with the whole his spiritual being, on those realms, in those souls, in those farther or closer universes, brought by the ones who read their stories in the plain sight of the ones who were reading those stories. In books he found out partial, individual answers to the questions which were tormenting him, for he always felt that he way longing for something unknown, something that was situated beyond everything, something in the inner inside. But that thing he had been searching for he hadn't found it in any of the books and, consequently, the full peace he had been always searching for it had remained unachieved.

Now his unrest was growing higher and it was engulfing him like some dark water squashing him like a wall, suffocating him, drowning him, and separating him from his own self. That darkness was flooding him, stealing the light from him!

In the library, just in the front of the place he stopped, there was a quite bulky book, with black simple cover, without any ornaments. He felt the impulse of getting that book out of the shelf. He never read that book; he not even remembered of having that book amongst his books. He opened it randomly and he read the first verse his look fell upon:

“Voice of God, not of man (...)”

He remained still, amazed, engulfed by a strange serenity that sprang out of his interior when he read that verse. It was a quietude he never experienced before. It was not a result of his efforts to get appeased, but it was some kind of manifestation of that will from above his self, that brought him off that dark water that flooded him before.

He felt that that verse spoke to him directly and intentionally, that through those six words a message had been conveyed to him... that he was given an explanation about the

situation he was in, and that he received, in the same time, an assurance that everything was to be well. Strangely, he felt like there was a Person Who spoke to him, and that he was no longer alone in that tribulation...

In the end, he looked at that book more attentively: it was a Bible...

He understood that there was no point in resisting that move, because that move brought him on the path of his destiny; which, in his case, as he started to see by then, it was to be an always renewed deluge and a perpetual retrieval of the light's shore.

Motto: “Multos timere debet quem multi timent.”¹⁸

Awakening 3 – Comrade First-Secretary

“Comrade First-Secretary is coming! Comrade First-Secretary is coming!”

Those were the words, full of some sort of dread and of course of servility, uttered by that colonel, the secretary of the Regiment’s party structure, while he was running towards the formation where all the Regiment’s personnel were gathered in, in order to present the honors.

From that black car got off that small and fat woman, being over fifty years old, and wearing some very thick eyeglasses. Her clothes, despite the fact that anybody could see that they were expensive, they didn’t suit her by any means.

He, the Young Officer, he didn’t like to present military honors to civilians, for those ones had no military rank and the whole thing seemed like a cheap flattering... He wondered why the whole commanding staff was acting so slavishly in front of that woman who could be anything but not a commander!

Time had passed and now he encountered her again. That woman retired – one can also read here that she “hid” herself – from the public life after the Revolution; she suffered a shock during the violent days, when she had to escape the revolutionaries’ fury, and she retired immediately after.

Now she had that look of a defeated human being; in the same time, one could easily see at her the rancor and the blaming she was addressing to the situation she was in.

She was clothed in outdated clothes, tailored in the style of the fashion of the “proletariat’s dictatorship”. Her training was as engineer, but she never worked in a factory. She never produced anything but orders to implement the communist regime’s policy. She was a boss ever since she was young...

Now she got suddenly old, and put on a lot of weight.

“Why had they had feared her so much?”

¹⁸ Lat.: “The one feared by many, he must fear the many.”

Later he understood that no man has any power while he is alone. The power comes from belonging to an apparatus that puts in work a doctrine.

Motto: “Magno animo de rebus iudicandum est.”¹⁹

Sign 1 – Remembrance

A small Church was arranged there, in that tiny building situated in the school's yard. That small Church had the capacity of receiving inside at most forty believers, but in the important holidays the people terribly crowded inside and outside it, in order to attend the religious services. The ones remained outside they leaned against the walls, like they were supporting that Church to stay in place and to stay together. In fact, the one supporting them was that little Church itself.

He, the Young Officer, he arrived there a little later, but she still managed to enter the door, and he stood next to a little table where the people were giving their lists with persons to be remembered at the Holy Liturgy, and where one could buy candles for placing them in that two trays, one destined for living and one for dead.

He wanted to hand over his lists, one mentioning the living members of his family, and the other for his dead relatives. But there was nobody to take his list to the altar. He so keenly wanted to be his Spiritual Father remembered at that Holy Liturgy, because that one was suffering after having a car accident.

The remembrance started, the priests were mentioning the names of the remembered persons, but that man, who had the duty of taking the lists to the altar, that one still stood next to the altar's door taking care of a candle, as he would have the intention to avoid taking any more lists.

He, the Young Officer, seeing that his intentions seemed a lost cause, he placed the lists and some money on that table, thinking that they will be remembered on the next Sunday.

He thought:

“God has already seen my intentions and my love manifested for my Spiritual Father! God sees also the things from within my soul!... Shame on me, for I came here too late!”

¹⁹ Lat.: “Great things must be reckoned with a great soul.”

“It is being remembered here the Spiritual Father named..., for he is suffering after a car accident... May God help him, and give him good health!”

He couldn't believe it! He thought he didn't hear well... He turned toward the table where he placed the lists. There was nothing there. But the one who was taking care of that table didn't come to take those lists...

An unbearable feeling of happiness flooded his chest. He wanted so keenly, with so much love, to be his Spiritual Father remembered, and that thing happened...

Could have somebody taken those lists and give them to the altar? But he saw nobody approaching that table...

Or, could have been that a first sign?...

Motto: “Non donum dantis, sed respice cor tribuentis.”²⁰

Paradise 6 – Mucky

Mucky, his dog, it was a gift from a friend; that friend's father hit the little doggy with an iron rod and it seemed that he broke a leg to it. That cruel punishment was administrated because the doggy killed three ducklings. That half breed of Irish setter with who knows what other breed, it manifested early its hunter instinct.

After two weeks of limping, the doggy became like any other doggy, foolishly digging holes in the front yard rose garden, barking at passersby, stealing the slippers, or biting as playing, the heels of the people entering that courtyard.

The sufferance that doggy experienced, it didn't take from him his happy spirit, but it made it, kind of, more intelligent. What meant at that time being even more playful.

The often pilgrimages in the nature, together with his master, they transformed that dog in an addicted to the fresh plains covered in raw crops, of the all sort of water ponds, of the River, of the so beautifully waves hills, and of the deciduous forests, all of those hiding so may creatures deserving to be “hunted”.

So that, when he, the Young Student, he decided not to take his dog with him to the walk, Mucky, not being able to jump over the front fence, it ran through the back yard, dug under the fences from there, tore apart some other fences, and appeared in front of his master, and it kept that advance, the whole trip, not answering, of course, to any command of his master who was trying to send it at home.

Another strategy of getting rid of him was tried. When the dog went further, intending to wait for his master on a point on the trail, his master changed directions and went on different paths. But the dog quickly caught up with him and “reproached” him his attitude by joyfully jumping around him.

²⁰ Lat.: “Do not look at the present of the one who gives it, but take heed at his heart.”

The hares and the pheasants were being chased out of their hiding places; after each feat like that, the dog came and sit in front of his master and looked him in the eyes, as for asking him if he understood and if he approved his actions.

When the Young Student was fishing on that river, the dog waited for him in the shadow of the willows, or in the tall grass full of wild flowers, checking from time to time if his master was still there.

It was such a wonder seeing that dog running down and jumping on a hill slope, one covered in multicolored flowers, having above that grass only his head with his floating long ears and with those two light brown stains situated above its eyebrows – he called that as “eyeglasses”.

Over time, that dog grew a little old and his personality changed. When barking, its thick voice made all the neighboring dogs to shut up. His posture became stiff, with the chest pushed forwards, and the walking style was a majestic one, as one of a master inspecting his domain.

When his master turned back in the short vacations, Mucky showed him a more temperate, a more dignified affection, but, in the same time, a more profound one. His look seemed to express both the joy of meeting again and the reproach for the time spent separately. It looked like that whole time they were separated the dog’s reason of being it was to wait for his master.

They enjoyed any moment of being together, to walk together, again and again, the old paths: either summer or winter...

To him, to the Young Student, those pilgrimages in nature were an attempt of gaining back his childhood, to convince himself, almost forcedly, that nothing changed, and to try to keep himself connected to the life that was pulsing so purely in the nature, a life which, because he lost that absolute freedom he had, he became increasingly isolated from.

Year after years the things seemed the same, with Mucky waiting for his master and spending that quality time together, but in the same time the things were evolving unnoticed. Until, on that day, when his master arrived for that winter vacation, and Mucky was no longer there for waiting for his friend...

Motto: “Malum non protest totaliter consumere bonum.”²¹

Banishing 5 – Revolution

Those inspection commissions followed one after another, endlessly. They succeeded to instill a state of apathy, of habituation of the controlled ones with the presence of the chief from the higher echelons.

Things started to stagnate; the activities were done almost formally, the inspections passed on the counter-productive side, when, “after you got accustomed with being beaten, you no longer care of it, neither it makes you more sapient”.

Autumn feel unexpectedly. The personnel were legging behind with their days of vacation, and those days not benefitting of all your vacation days until the year finished, it was considered a big problem. In the same time, in order to preserve the combat capacity of the military units, no more than a third of the personnel was allowed to leave – at least the regulations provided that. The situation was the same with the conscript soldiers, who also had a few weeks of vacation each year. While planning and performing those endless inspections, nobody thought at vacations, and now they had to transgress the regulations either way they chose. So that almost half of the personnel were sent forcedly in vacation. The Regiment’s caserne seemed almost empty after they all left for home.

He, the Young Officer, waited for no longer and he left for the birth place of his wife, for she remained with her parents in order to take care of her for she was pregnant, and he saw, due to the endless terrorist inspections that he was unable to provide her any support. In the same time, their apartment had almost no heating, unlike that one of his wife’s parents, where they had sometimes to keep the windows open because it was too warm inside. Even more, not “being connected” to the food mafia from the city they were living in, the young couple was unable to buy almost anything. The food

²¹ Lat.: “The evil cannot totally consume the good.”

stores were empty so that, even if his salary was a good one, they kind of went hungry.

Then he went at his parental home, trying to buy there the necessary means in order to install a wood stove in the apartment back home. He found and bought a little stove, but he didn't find anywhere the metal pipes form driving out the smoke.

So that the telegram ordering him to urgently go back to the Regiment found him a few days after he actually had to be already present there.

Bear in mind there were almost no telephones. When an alarm was issued, in order to summon up the personnel, a soldier was sent to the post office, with a box full of pre-written telegrams, and the employees from there started to send hundreds of telegrams via telex-machine. But in that situation, when - as he found out later - the whole country was under alarm, the fact of transmitting all those telegrams it was almost impossible to carry out with the necessary accuracy.

He, the Young Officer, he was visiting one of his aunts - an sacred obligation was to visit all your relatives when coming at home, because, otherwise they would have found out and they would have been upset with you... -, when a neighbor arrived and handed him a sheet of paper on which he wrote three words: "Execute _____!".

It was the password for battle alarm! He was in the next train towards the Regiment. But, in order to reach there, he had to change three trains, each leg of the trip being followed by a period of waiting for the next train in those filthy rail stations.

In one bigger rail station, while waiting for the next train to arrive, he noticed two young guys - he definitely had the guts feeling that they were Young Officers like he was, but maybe they were intelligence officers -, who were attentively looking at the package he was carrying with him. He looked at them and smiled at them like saying: "Do not worry, for this is not a grenade launcher..." in the same time with: "We are in the same boat..." It seemed his smile worked and they left him alone.

He arrived to the Regiment two days after the echelon destined to repress the Revolution was already sent in mission.

When arriving to the Regiment all the colleagues he met they wondered about him and asked him how he got there. He answered that he came by public transportation...

“And didn’t they kill you?!...”

The manipulation was so thick and the militaries imagined the civilian beyond the Regiment’s gates were searching in the streets for military to kill...

He went directly to the officer in command, who was at that time the Regiment’s chief of staff, and he reported there.

That officer, almost exhausted with tiredness, and also very surprised by his arrival, asked him what was he doing there... And then sent him in a hurry to announce the Regiment’s human resources office and the communist organization’s chief that he presented himself at alarm and to erase him from the list that was about to be hierarchical communicated.

The human resources officer and the communist organization secretary, they communicated him that he was put on the list with the personnel unjustifiably missing (namely not in medical conditions, or detached to other unities, etc.), and he was to be punished, maybe by being arrested or at least being kicked off the army. One more day of absence and the police would have been informed to search for him and to arrest him like a criminal.

“But the telegram wasn’t correctly addressed to me, concerning the person and the location... And that telegram was written by you!” replied him, in his desperation, despite his usual irreproachable military conduct.

“Let me see that!” asked him the party chief.

He, the Young Officer, he showed him that telegram but, in a moment of inspiration – like a clear thought instilled by someone else -, he didn’t gave him that telegram, because it was his only defense. Somehow, he felt that those people would have been capable to destroy that piece of evidence – his only proof that it wasn’t his fault – in order to save their own skins when, once the events had passed, the prosecution would have been started.

Still trying to justify themselves, the party chief asked him something enormously wrong at that time, punishable with persecution and prison under the communist regime:

“But don’t you listen to Free Europe Radio?!”

“Sir, I surely don’t!”

Facing such a determined reaction and a written proof, those people erased him from that fatidic list and acted like nothing would have happened, despite the fact that their own mistake would have cost him the military career and, possibly, the freedom...

Missing for three days from your military unit in the conditions you weren’t officially permitted to do that, it was qualified as desertion and it was punished with years in the military prison – the worst of all, at that time.

After the initial shock of entering such a harsh and unknown and different reality, he the Young Officer, he was engulfed by that fever everybody had it. He congratulated himself for leaving his wife with her parents. He knew nothing about what was happening. He imagined that the only reason he was summoned to the Regiment was maybe another inspection, as usual, and, in a week or two he followed to leave again for vacation.

But he found himself geared up for war, amazed by the fact that, until yesterday, you weren’t allowed to lose even a sole cartridge, and now, on the company’s halls there were flowing from all around all different calibers of ammunitions. The machinegun belts, loaded with hundreds of rounds, were taken at anybody’s will, and the boxes with hand grenades were give to anybody who asked for them, without nobody keeping records.

He took a sub-machinegun with a folding end, and mounted at it a round machinegun ammunition magazine, because instead of having thirty rounds in a usual magazine, now he had seventy. The whole contraption looked like something destined to the Special Forces...

All of them felt they were under siege! From outside the caserne an almost incarnated menace was waiting for them, pushing towards them, so painfully unknown until then, the specter of the fear.

“You, lieutenant, come here!”

The chief of staff didn’t even know his name. But that wasn’t so unusual... he didn’t committed any stupid thing, he was in the Regiment only for a year, he didn’t belong to their

“mob”... He was a simple officer, uprooted from his birth place and thrown in the arid soil of the mother land, having in the same time a sickly trust in principles, which was totally inappropriate for survival in those conditions...

“Yes, sir!”

“Are you able to defend the Printing House?”

“Yes, sir! I am!”

“Take a few soldiers and come back here in a half an hour!”

He ran to the company, having all those questions he followed to answer later. Namely, why the chief of staff asked whether he was able to?!... He was taught that, if he receives an order, he will do everything to execute it!... And why was he asked to “pick a few soldiers”?!... He was accustomed to be given a precise mission order: what, with what, with whom, where for how long, whom was him to cooperate with, when the mission was to be finished etc.

But, as his company commander used to say: “What an order is given you like, likewise are you going to execute it!”

“Attention! Listen to me! Pick up your armament and you ammunition! After me, in running, march on!”

A few soldier, none of them belonging to his platoon, they grabbed their machine guns, a few boxes with ammunition, a couple of boxes with hand grenades, and they started following him in running.

They were already waited for, by a quite rattletrap all terrain vehicle, whose muffler was throwing behind a black smoke.

“When you arrive to the Printing House, ask about lieutenant-colonel... His wife works there. They say they are going to be attacked by terrorists!”

That was the whole combat order!

They hoop in that vehicle and left for mission. No one knew the location of the Printing House in that city. For, usually, you had nothing to do with it, being under the communist regime some sort of special objective.

“Go back! You can’t pass further! Right ahead there are shootings! Try and take it to the right!”

The driver panicked. They all were tense and felt fear. The driver pulled the steering wheel and took it to the right and accelerated on that side street, almost hitting a passerby.

The street were empty of people, but, the lieutenant observed two athletic people, dressed up with almost identical civilian clothes, having their hair cuts in a military fashion, and carrying with them two big suitcases resembling to the ones the freshly graduated militaries were given after graduating.

They seemed to be quite scared when they saw that vehicle full with armed militaries speeding in their direction.

He, the Young Officer, he had that fugitive thought of asking the driver to pull the car over and to “ask those guys about their health”, but he had another mission and he quickly renounced to do that.

He was later wondering if those two men weren’t so-called “terrorists”, and, if his decision of crossing forward without disturbing them, it saved a few lives, in case a shooting would have taken place.

Despite the fact our decisions always seem to us as inspired by our rationality, there is always, in the background of everything we decide to do, a guiding line that protects us or, a contrary, it leads us to temptation and to getting harmed, or even to our demise.

“Go around! In front of us, in that balcony, there is a nest of terrorists! They are shooting at the population!” shouted to them a “man of good”.

He, the lieutenant, he didn’t understand quite well these messages. Who those terrorists were?! How came they were shooting at the population?!... Weren’t there the militia and the secret services to put those terrorists down?!... Didn’t those militarized forces, together with the communist party, control everything that moved?!... Where those terrorists got their weapons from?!...

The driver got around one more time, in that small street, and, after another quarter of an hour, they arrived to that unassuming building.

In front of that building all the employees were gathered as for waiting for an official visit of a high party official, in order to greeting him up. They were applauding

them as saviors! They were shouting out, repeatedly and hypnotically, the slogan: "The Army is with us!"

He later wondered where all those slogans were coming from, and how they were crafted to have so much influence over the people's mind... It seemed that the masses were driven here and there, to do that of this, to feel this or that, by simply launching those slogans... who were the authors, and who were the distributors of those slogans?!...

The small garrison got off that vehicle ill of oldness and lack of maintenance, and walked, a little embarrassed because of that welcoming – at least him, the lieutenant – and went towards that massive individual, a tall man, from the center of than rally.

"Are you the manager?"

"Yes... Um... I didn't do anything. I only went at home and I had my hunting shotgun and the cartridges in the boot of the car... But I didn't do anything wrong! Actually, why have you come?!..."

"We've been sent here to defend the Printing House against terrorists!"

"So!... – answered that one, relieved... Welcome then! Please, come inside! Here we could be in the shooting range of someone's weapon!..."

Once the improvised guard had been installed, he, the young lieutenant, he did what he had been never told in the whole his military training: he drew a sketch of the objective and on that he organized the defense plan, according to the possibilities of being attacked and to the access ways that building had.

He appointed the soldiers in guarding posts, on the entrance ways, and then he established main and secondary firing sectors to each one and instructed them regarding their mission, the communications, and the ways to cooperate; he also appointed a replacer in case that himself is wounded or dead. Each guarding post had been provided with a quantity of ammunition and grenades. There was no personnel reserve in case of loses, so that he was to one to double the guard if a guarding post was under attack. He wrote a "guarding order" on a sheet of brown paper he received it from the Printing House, and then he established his command post on the

upper room, in a room that provided maximum protection against snipers and, in the same time, it offered a good perspective over what was happening below. That room was also aside, to the right of the staircase and in case of need it would have been provided an excellent place to shoot at the attackers coming up that staircase. He didn't know back then, but that room was actually the manager's office...

Soon after he finished organizing the defense, the manager came to him and asked him to come and see some people who were throwing grenades from their balconies situated at the apartment blocks from around two hundred meters. The proposal was to shoot at them from the roof of the building.

He, the young lieutenant watched very carefully and he truly saw some stupid people staying on their balconies and leaning downwards in the attempt to see what was happening. The manager's proposal had, somehow, a suggestion force, but, again, the lieutenant seemed to be driven by an upper force and he didn't fall to it.

"We cannot shoot at them. They are too far, and we do not have sniper rifles."

"But they are throwing grenades at the population!"

"Let's go and make a phone call to the Regiment and they will send a task force..."

He, the young lieutenant, he ordered the soldiers not to fire but only at his command, and not influenced by the requests from anybody else.

"Do not shoot because somebody tells you so! These people are frightening even by their own shadow! Or they are, maybe, trying to provoke us and to manipulate us! Maybe they are the "terrorists"!... I need two volunteers!"

To his deep surprise, the two soldier offering themselves as volunteers were the ones he knew as the most unruly. Now they seemed so mature, as they would have had a few years of war behind.

"You are going to permanently keep an eye on me!..."

The first night sneaked in the surroundings, making them dark. Though it was December, there was a beautiful weather, with high temperature as in spring time. There was no

snow at all. The poplar trees from the front of the Printing House seemed that they were about to budding up.

“Comrade Lieutenant, there is a phone call for you...”

“Don’t you want me to send there some dumper trucks in order to place them around the Printing House as a defending metal wall?”

He was surprised by that proposal... How comes: to make a metal wall made with dumper trucks?!... Might that be an attempt to attack the objective?...

“I don’t know...”

“I am sending them right now!”

The other speaker was the manager of the transportation company having its garages a little further on the same street.

Was that to be providential or fatal? Where was the Young Officer to know from?!... He didn’t have the thinking apparatus fitted to process the parameters of this new situation he was involved in. And, even if he refused the proposal, he wouldn’t have the necessary means to stop them coming.

Soon, a thick cloud of barely burnt diesel flooded the exterior and the interior of the Printing House. The steel-concrete walls were vibrating under the pressure of the sound waves the big engines were emitting. The whole operation took less than an hour and the people who brought those vehicles they vanished like they would have never been there.

“I wonder if their intention was to hinder and cut short our firing range?!...”

But that initiative proved to be a providential one. No “terrorist” had any longer the possibility to attack the Printing House from distance, because the height of those dumping trucks covered the tall windows.

“Give us some people! Hurry up! Somewhere close to here there is somebody shooting at the population! Come and help us annihilate the “terrorists”!”

There was a middle age man who asked him, the young lieutenant, to come to the front gate and who made that request. That man seemed to try blending amongst the workers but there was something wrong with him. The worker clothing he wore was too clean. His white mustache and his white hair

were too neat. And he had in his eyes a too intelligent expression; those blue eyes seemed to try hypnotizing the young lieutenant.

He, the young lieutenant, looked in the eyes of that man and felt for him both affection and pity... That man could have been the father he never had, and though, that man was trying to manipulate him!...

"We cannot miss any soldier we have here, sir. We are only a handful of people, and, in case some of us leave, we no longer are able to fulfill our mission..."

Saying that, he, the young lieutenant, he looked in that man's eyes with an innocent expression, and, in some extent, that man had noticed that the lieutenant might have known about his real intentions.

That one disappeared together with the group of "man of good" who accompanied him. That childish and candid answer unbalanced him and destabilized the whole plot.

But again, the young and inexperienced and untrained for that kind of situations lieutenant, he could have been fooled by the superior intelligence and preparation all those provocateurs and manipulators had; in addition to that, there was in place a national level terror campaign, making the whole population hysterical. Why had him been protected? And by whom? By chance?

After that group of "people of good" left, he took the key of the access door and introduced that rule that all the soldiers to seek shelter behind the concrete pillars of that building, on each time they see a shadow through that green sheet glass the front door had. The night fell. It was an advantage, but also a disadvantage the fact that right in the front of the Printing House there was a pillar with a light bulb illuminating the street. They could see anybody trying to access the front door. It was a disadvantage because if somebody was familiar with that area, that one would easily identify their location.

In the front door there was, for some reason, an opening having a cover in order to block it. He, the young lieutenant, he ordered that opening to be blocked and nobody to open it because through there one can shoot or throw grenade inside the building.

“There are heavy fights all around the city. It seems that we are being attacked by strong forces!...”

The manager just arrived with fresh news (or maybe with a new mission...) after a few hours he spent in the city.

He, the young lieutenant, he went and prepared the soldiers for the worst. They could hear from the direction the Regiment was – from east –, the roar of hundreds of weapons, which were being fired almost ceaselessly. They also saw the night’s dark sky pricked through by millions of bullets fired at an invisible enemy. It seemed that an entire war was just started!

“Get out of here! What war?!... That colleague told him on an occasion, almost a year after. It was me one of the attackers! The mother-fuckers sent me, with a group of soldiers, to check the bridge if it was mined... The command received a phone call telling them that stupid thing, and they didn’t think at all. They fell in that plot like a fly in a boiling pot. When we reached there, all the militaries deployed on the Regiment’s walls, they started firing at us, at will. I found out later that they were informed, also by a phone call, that a group of terrorists is trying to blow that bridge up, in order to isolate the Regiment from the city. Good for me, in the Military School for Engineers I was taught about bridges and we had some exercises at that bridge in the previous summer. So I knew where to hide inside that bridge. The bullets were making a sinister noise... I prayed not to be hit by artillery shells! The poor soldiers peed, shit, and vomited because of fear. Until late in the morning, when they came to see whom they had shot, we didn’t move from there. They were so surprised finding us there!... I wonder who sent us and who misinformed them?!... That one, or those ones, those were the real “terrorists”!!! It must be someone who had access to the Regiment’s communications in cooperation with someone who was in the Regiment’s command! And those must know the military art for they provided sufficiently believable information in order to create that type of missions!”

He, the Young Officer, he stood up the whole night, walking on the Printing House’s halls. There was a gloomy, suffocating atmosphere. Once the dawn was there, a heavy silence overwhelmed everything. He felt again abandoned,

plucked off from the Mother Regiment's body... The time itself seemed too tired to go on...

"How did he know?!... He was thinking. "How had he been able to think so maturely?!..."

It was about the Chief of Staff who asked - a couple of days before they were sent to guard the Printing House - to be provided some batteries for the radio stations the defending forces had around the City Hall, because theirs were already flat and they had no possibility to charge batteries there.

During that summer he, the Young Officer, he was appointed to go and take an all terrain vehicle for NBRC research. That vehicle had also a powerful radio station for communicating the obtained data concerning the chemical, nuclear, radiological and biological situation, back to the headquarters. He took the two batteries that radio station was provided with, and embarked in an armored vehicle and went to the City Hall.

The streets were empty. The City was emptied of people.

"Where could they all be?!..." he wondered.

Once they arrived in the neighborhood of the City hall, they could hear that huge roar, that formidable rumble the multitude of people was causing it, by rallying in the front of the building.

He presented himself at the Chief of Staff and reported the fact that the batteries were there. The order he received was to give those batteries to the chief of communications who was also there, and he carried on that order.

Before the City Hall's building there were positioned with the front ends directed towards that multitude of people, five armored vehicles. Their heavy machine guns were raised on a forty five angle up. The crews were staying with the turrets' covers open, deepened from their waists down, in the vehicles, and being outside from their waists up, and they were watching that menacing crowd.

There didn't seem to be a too high animosity between that crowd and the army forces. Some of the people present there, both military and civilians, they knew each other and they exchanged salutations, or even jokes. The militaries were asking about their families, when they saw a neighbor or even a relative, because they didn't see they families from a month

by now, and they had no communication ways with them. The asked ones were answering with benevolence and sympathy.

Suddenly, the Chief of Staff appeared accompanied by a small and stocky major who came from the hierarchical superior echelon, and who came to supervise how the orders the party issued were being carried on.

He, the young lieutenant, because he wasn't been told what to do next – after he brought and gave those radio station batteries -, he approached the two superior officer and waited there, at the distance the regulation told, waiting to receive the permission to speak.

“If you do not give the firing order, I am going to shoot you!... Do you hear me? If those people take one more step forwards and you do not give the firing order, I am going to shoot you! ”

That chubby major and the Chief of Staff who was a captain back then, they were involved in a scene which, if it wasn't so dramatic, it would be laughable. The first one of them, he was probably instructed to ensure that any rallying of people - in order to manifest against the communist party - will be squashed at all costs. He drew his pistol out of his holster and put the firing end of the barrel on the Chief of Staff's chest. But, that major being so short and the Chief of Staff being so tall, the first one must stay with his cheek and his hand raised upwards, trying to impose himself to the one whom he was threatening.

He, the Young Officer, he instinctively laid his hand of the holster where he had his pistol, and undone the buckle. One of his commanders was just being threatened to be shot and he felt the unconscious need to protect him. He felt that by protecting his commander he was protecting himself...

“Go to hell and fuck yourself!... You are going to shoot nobody!” it was the answer the Chief of Staff gave to that major, uttered with loud and heavy words, while staring him in his eyes like piercing there some sharp daggers.

After saying that, the Chief of Staff pushed that one's hand aside, turned around and ordered with a loud voice:

“Nobody fires without my command!”

That major remained there without knowing what to do next, like in a state of shock, with his hands fallen on both

sides of his body, still holding in his left hand that pistol – for he was left-handed.

Later on, the Young Officer, he found out from his colleagues that that major went inside the City Halls' building and gathered the personnel from there and showed them how to pierce the demonstrators with the bayonets...

“Slash them, cut them asunder!”

A reserve command post was put in place a year earlier. That command post had the possibility to take over all the communication flows, in case the Regiment was incapacitated. Arranged in the exterior of the stronghold the Regiment was functioning in, that reserve command post was then ready and fully equipped.

That major went there and urgently informed the hierarchical superior echelon that:

“THE REGIMENT FRATERNIZED WITH THE REVOLUTIONARIES! I URGENTLY ASK FOR FORCES IN ORDER THE REGIMENT TO BE NEUTRALIZED!”

God, though, spared them! – with the help, consciously or unconsciously provided by the “terrorists”. A tragedy could have happened, one which would have been justified, maybe, the number of deaths the official communication/manipulation channels announced.

From that small town where an artillery regiment and a missiles regiment were dislocated, a task force was approaching the City, in order to bombard the Regiment. Of course they knew the exact location, for they belonged to the same Mechanized Brigade, and the military units were marked on the common maps. They wanted to occupy firing positions on places around the Regiment and to destroy it by using the indirect firing.

When they arrived to a major crossroads, a mandatory crossing point, a heavy automatic shooting was opened at them – at least their impression was like that, because no bullet holes were found later and nobody was wounded. It could have been there about those famous “sound simulators” everybody spoke about...

Sure thing, the militaries from the trucks quickly disembarked and sought for cover wherever they could. In the neighborhood there were also two platoons from the Regiment,

send there for checking a villa “about which everybody knew that it belonged to a Securitate officer” and wherefrom they were announce that “somebody shoots at the population”. Not finding anything in the objective they checked out, and hearing all these shootings, the two platoons came to help their colleagues.

“They have sent us to destroy you all! The order was: “erase them from the face of the earth!”... They have said that you have fraternized with the revolutionaries!...”

“Mother fuckers! They are stupid and imbeciles! How comes we have fraternized with the revolutionaries?!... Our men from City Hall are barely keeping their positions!...”

The artillery and missiles task force went back to their caserne. But other dangers were to come one after another, in a quick succession, playing with the Regiment’s nerves.

In the Printing House now was quietude. Surrounded by those dumper trucks the building was sheltering all the workers who no longer wanted to go at home.

“We are going to defend the Printing House!” declared the workers there.

Since “the Army was with them” they felt protected and indebted to fight, somehow, the myths of the former communist regime and they were striving to understand the new symbols and the new beliefs which were being inoculated to the general population at that moment in time.

“Let’s print a manifesto!” proposed the production foreman. And in no more than about an hour, between eleven and twelve in the night, they printed a newspaper sheet, which they called it “The Truth”.

Those heavy and very old machineries, articulate in a giant mechanical beast, those printing presses which had been inundating the people’s minds with the “masterpieces” of the communist wooden thinking and speaking, not they printed a newspaper sheet wearing on it an urge to resistance against communism.

This was another example that the sayings of the Desert Fathers are true: “not a certain material thing is bad, but the used the man gives to it”.

He, the Young Officer, he was fascinated by those metallic rattle, the whole production line seeming to a giant

rattle snake, not producing a different kind of venom. By dominating that giant snake, ordinary and simple people were becoming ministrants of the words, celebrating a Liturgy of the Liberty.

On that day, the manager of the Printing House faced the first attempt of the workers to force him to resign. Those days the people manifested that mad attraction towards denying any form of authority²². The man proposed to be the new manager, the production foreman, he turned down that proposal, saying that he knew how to manage the production and not how to manage the bureaucracy, and then, who could do what he was doing? So that, at least for a little while, the manager still kept his position – despite the fact that nobody was paying him any attention.

The manifesto was distributed for free, to the population – by the way, that programmatic and so inspired name was, soon after, stolen by a newspaper from the Capital City – those people knew how to protect the stolen name by recording it at the National Patents Office.

“We are going to send an all terrain vehicle to pick you up. You are the NBRC specialist. The Revolutionaries informed us about the existence of toxic substances within the City Hall’s building!”

“If that had been the case, they would have been dead long time ago!”

“Come on! We must soothe them down!... They barely let the Commander free after they arrested him!...”

Indeed, the Regiment’s Commander was arrested, consequently to the proposal of overwrought Colonel of the National Guards, who was partaker to the Revolutionary Committee. The President of the Revolutionary Committee was an actor playing the paramount role of his career; he ordered the Regiment’s Commander to be arrested. As the people from there said, the Regiment’s Commander deserved his fate, for,

²² In thirty years after the Revolution, that denial of authority and the climbing up to the power of totally unqualified people, and also the fact that the former system of values so powerfully instilled in the people’s minds it wasn’t replaced by the new values system of the democracy, they weakened the entire society and a “political” cancer spread within the whole body of the society, on all levels, being now in a metastases state.

being present there: “he knew nothing else to do but to kiss they hands of the hookers who invaded the City hall and to stand up and knock his heels before everybody of the wicked people who wanted a slice of the newly spoiled power.

And it seemed that the English word “populace” – instead of “population” – perfectly suited those people. They gathered like flies do on dung, and they stood there, in that Round Room, watching the TV and robbing the pantry the former Prime Secretary had there, drinking instant coffee with sour cream on top and eating chocolate... Believe it or not, that coffee and that chocolate were the expression of an ultimate luxury to a people living in famine and needs.

That was the state he, the Young Officer, he found the Representatives of the Local Revolution in, when he went to inspect that building in order to determine if it was contaminated or not.

Revolutionary were sitting around that giant Round Table, keeping their feet up and placed on that table, as an expression of power. They were wearing only socks, and their feet stunk like hell. Actually, that entire room awfully smelled of perspiration and unwashed bodies and clothes.

Suddenly, the people present there started applauding and shouting out. The Color TV – he, the Young Officer, he never saw one before – it was broadcasting the scene of the interrogation did to Little Nicu, the youngest son of Ceausescu. That man was in his early forties back then.

That Unfortunate was wearing a training suit made of nylon fiber – it was the ultimate trend at the time -, and he had his nose broken and his face covered in blood. He was rotating his eyes like a cornered beast, very agitated, very scared, but in the same time trying to keep a minimum control upon that situation he was in. He knew that the crowd usually attacks that one they felt as being weak, and it spares the powerful that was guilty or not...

Watching that scene from TV, he, the Young Officer, he didn't understand what all those violence and brutality were good for... He didn't feel himself avenged by that manifestation of animality; on the contrary, he started feeling pity for the weak one...

He, the Young Officer, he didn't stay there for too long, for he left the Little Guard to defend by itself that Printing House. He had the feeling that his Little Brothers were left alone in the house and they were playing with the fire. So that he quickly reported that there weren't any NBRC substances by any means, and he turned back from where he came.

Back to the Printing House everything was ok. The manager asked a nearby restaurant to provide the militaries with food. They before ate only dry black bread and canned meat.

Now everybody were content and relaxed; the people started to feel themselves "free" and almost "equals", though, as always when it comes about the human being, some people already started to be "more equal than others"...

The Newspaper started to be printed on a daily basis. The Printing House still had a stock of necessary materials, material considered now, in a way, as defiled, for they belonged to the "communist" era, so that they were distributing the Newspaper for free. Those people knew nothing about managing themselves to be provided with raw materials, a fact that followed to cause later so much trouble and the collapse of the entire country's economy. The centralized regimes cause and promote that lack of initiative – people are very good executants but by no means managers. They wait for a command "coming from above" and they are dying because of the fear of not committing any mistake they hierarchically superior bosses to hold them accountable for...

The articles published in the Newspaper were Patriotic, Revolutionary, instigating to and manifesting Freedom – whatever that freedom meant...

News was coming from everywhere, causing a overloading of the general psychic to the brink of blowing up. It was a psycho-social war for keeping the population in a groggy state. Punch after punch, applied in the sensitive points, combining the attacks on the rational reasoning with the attacks on the collective unconscious, all of them destined to keep the population under control. The minds and the souls were being poisoned by the manipulation issued by some "consummate" Professionals.

As it was also the case when, still being in the front of the City Hall, he, the Young Officer, he watched the way the Chief of Staff was reacting during that bombardment with information. - Here we must mention that "Fake News" isn't an invention of the recent times, regardless the fact that we like to consider ourselves the first in everything... "Fake News" it was yet the lie told by the snake to Eva and Adam, when it convinced them to eat from the Tree of Life. "Fake News" is simply a lie...:

"The Securitate Members are infiltrated in the guarding formation and they are going to arrest the Militaries!"; "Amongst the Demonstrators there are Armed Individuals and their attack on the militaries is imminent!"; "The Army changed sides and is not with the Revolution!"; "The Revolution must be crushed in blood!"; "The Fifth Column is going to attacks!"; "The Foreign Secret Services sent vehicles with four Agents in each vehicle, armed to the teeth!"

"The Securitate Members are about to shoot us from the roofs of the high buildings!..."

That seemed quite possible! Around the City Hall there were only high buildings, having common attics that offered good possibility for snipers; so that, all the weapons had been aimed to the surrounding building's roofs.

"What the fuck ore those motherfuckers doing on that roof?!..." asked the Chief of Staff. "Hold your fire! Nobody shoots!"

Those Demonstrators appeared unexpectedly on a roof. They were around a hundred people, making a great noise, waving banners, and shouting out.

The first impression the Military had, was that they were under attack.

In case one Military fired his weapon, all of them would do the same thing. The own firing is regarded as a proof of them being under attack, so everybody starts shooting, even without seeing any enemy. That shooting is a crowd reflex.

The Chief of Staff impeded, again, a massacre. He had such a clear mind back then! He was inspired from above!

That plot fell because of that command! The same Professionals who issued the news about that imminent attack

they also instigated a part of the demonstrators to go up on that roof for making their point even clearer...

Professionals were infiltrated everywhere, like a network of manipulators, fighting a war with everybody's minds. They used the guns of the military and the victims of the demonstrators in order to compose that "alternative truth", that "alternative reality".

It seemed during the entire Revolution and the period after, the orchestrated actions of the Professionals followed the recopy presented by Gustave Le Bon: "The beliefs of a people cannot be changed except through a great sufferance"²³. Their goal was to create as much victims as they could. The number the National Television issued was sixty thousands of victims – probably that was the critical mass resulted out of the calculation they did. There was not spontaneous Revolution – there is no such a thing ever -, but a very thoroughly put in place plan.

That night came silently in that street where the Printing House was. The huge Poplar trees were peacefully waving their empty branches. That snowless winter seemed to be destined to a Revolution. It was an unusually hot weather for that period of the year.

All the lights were turned on in the street. The New Regime opened the taps to everything: heating, cold and hot water, electric power... for the Population to support them... There didn't matter the fact that the worn out pipes were blowing up everywhere, the wires were catching fire, and the people kept their windows open in order to be able to breath, because of too much heat was provided...

An armored troop carrier appeared in the Printing House's area. The Commanding Officer came at the Printing House's door and asked for seeing the Commander of the Defending Guard. When the two Officers met, the first one asked if the Militaries there needed anything, either food or ammunition...

"We are cool! We don't need anything!" answered the Young Officer.

²³ Gustave le Bon. 1913. *The Psychology of the Revolution*. English translation by Bernard Miall. Adelphi Terrace: London.

A soldier came in running and said with an agitated voice:

“You are called on the radio station!”

That officer ran and jumped in that troop carrier and they left in a hurry. After only a few minutes, that heavy machine gun, mounted on that armored troop carrier, it sounded menacing, tearing the night’s fabric in threatening stripes. They shot somebody, maybe some Terrorists...

He, the Young Officer, he found later that that tragedy left behind three dead policemen and one almost mortally wounded, who was in hospital barely fighting for his life, stuffed with bullets and shrapnel... Nobody could justify their actions. Of course they were victims to the same Professionals... They were in that area in a lightly armored police troop carrier destined to ensure protection against thrown object and maybe against pistol bullets... When they were asked to surrender, by the militaries, they tried to escape; or maybe they got scared... That police carrier was no match to those projectiles fired by that heavy machine gun the military carrier had.

People involved in cleaning that police carrier described how difficult it was to remove that clogged blood and, despite their best efforts, each time their inspected that vehicle they still found some blood stains in some hidden corners.

“All units to come back to the Regiment!” was the order everybody received. In the whole country there was a general withdrawal of all military units and subunits to the casernes they were dislocated from.

He, the Young Officer, he gathered his little guard, he checked all the armament and the ammunition, and they exited the Printing House and stood in front of it. The people working there got out, in order to give a last round of applause their protectors, their saviors. But the adulation moment quickly turned in laughter. That terrain vehicle sent to pick them up and to bring them back was refusing to start. It had to be towed by a dumper truck in order to start its engine.

Just arrived to the Regiment he, the Young Officer, he was immediately sent to the City Hall. This time, the Revolutionaries said that the Securitate Troops mined and contaminated the basement of that building.

Of course there wasn't anything like that! But the New Authorities, the New Power must be pleased, even if the requests are irrational!

In the front of the City Hall there was already formed a column out of the armored troop carriers from there – the last ones ordered to turn back to the casern. The forced which defended the communist City Hall against Revolutionaries, and then defended the Revolutionaries against Terrorists, they were no longer needed, and they were told to go at home. They followed – as the whole Army did - to be subjected to the revenge of everybody, to be blamed, to be trialed in courts, and to become everybody's problem and target of hatred...

But they weren't there yet... The Professionals achieved their objectives and they were preoccupied with something else for a little while.

He, the Young Officer, in order to not go back to the Regiment on foot, went to the Chief of Staff who was sitting on the first carrier and asked for the permission to embark on one of those vehicles.

“Hop on and sit next to me!”

That one even stretched downwards in order to give him a hand...

He, the Young Officer, he sat, out of respect, a little further back.

When the column started moving, the crowd started shouting out that hypnotic slogans, and applauding them, and cheering them up.

One of the Revolutionaries threw at him, at the Young Officer, a pack of cigarettes, and he caught that instinctively.

“Throw it away, when we are a little further, without him to see you. It could be poisoned.” he was advised by the Chief of Staff.

And so he did, all the more because he wasn't smoking at all.

The entire Regiment gathered on the plateau for an official counting. The armament was stored as usual, and the ammunition was given back to the storage units.

“We are not out of the woods yet! The casern can be attacked in any moment!” announced the Regiment's Commander.

The New Power feared the Military for they have the capacity of taking over the country. The Professionals passed to the next stage of Manipulation. Now the Military were to be kept occupied until necessary, and they could be kept so only threatened with a war. That offers the justification for their efforts and a plausible Alternative Reality.

The next phase in line – but nobody could have imagined back then – it was to blame the Military for no matter what, in order to develop to them a general feeling of being culpable; and then to intentionally sub-finance the Army – the moral of the troops it is everything in a combat of any nature.

Each sub-unit was assigned a sector of the stronghold's walls and they started to guard that sector day and night. They even dug individual foxholes for in case of a long defense fight.

While they, the Militaries were fighting an invisible – and inexistent, actually – enemy, the other Romanians, the Civilians, they were heavily involved in international contraband with everything the communist economy was still producing or it still had in stocks, from socks to white and red mercury, products they were crossing illegally the borders with, in the neighboring countries, and they were illegally selling those products in the markets next to the borders, and then the crossed back the national borders carrying with them, illegally, foreign currency.

Those “entrepreneurs” were the nursery for the new businessmen arising at the time and learning not so much how to produce something, but rather how to speculate anything. There was no education in managing something. The only education back then it was that to execute the “dispositions” coming from “above”. Those people were to discover by their own what it means planning, obtaining resources, facing the rapidly changing conditions of the market, adapting to the demand etc. But the scale they were doing at, it was the micro scale.

In less than a couple of decades, this new social class evolved to the political-economical mafia, and then they started to eliminate each other using the juridical system.

Motto: “Vim vincit virtus.”²⁴

Ark 4 – Petre Țuțea

“I don’t know what to think of the book you have given me to read it... The story of Father Nipho’n life it seems a fairytale story. You know, I kind of not believe in these things related to religion...”

In the rest, that guy, if the things said about him are true, he was a master of self-control. Few people can endure what he endured.

The story teller speaks about the things he believes in, like about daily things happening in the daily live. You know, I think the believers live in a fantasy of their own which, by so strongly believing in it, they transform it in an as much as one can get “reality”. But this is not my case... Of course we aren’t the ones leading our own destiny, because we are influenced by the social frame and by education. The evolution of the science is continuous and it permanently makes to be relative the scientific truths from before, which we considered as immovable certitudes”.

He, the Young Officer, he read that book but he didn’t take in its truths. Something kept him at the surface, at distance. It was like a friend who doesn’t tell you a certain thing because of the fear of not being mocked by you, because you can’t bear that thing.

During that period of the post-revolutionary thaw, the enthusiasm of the people believing in a illusory freedom, it allowed some books to be printed which otherwise would have never been issued; neither under the communist regime or under the capitalist regime from later, because those books are a menace addressed, generally, to all dominions. Those books are against the idea of man to man domination!

And one of those books was: “321 Memorable Sayings of Petre Țuțea”. He, the Young Officer, he was reading and reading again that book, being charmed by the simple naturalness that

²⁴ Lat.: “Virtue defeats force.”

“Genius of the oratory” in philosophical and mystical speech was able to convey the most complicated reasoning in. The more he read that book, the more he was increasingly charmed by that Genius’s discourse.

From a point further, it started to become obvious to him that in its inner inside, the communication with the Genius seemed awakening within his soul the same unrest the reading of the book about Father Niphon caused it before. In the beginning he thought that it was about a discontent the too much reading of the sayings caused it to him; then he attributed that feeling to the fact that him – raised in the “spirit” of the dialectical and historical materialist, profoundly atheist – he was embarrassed by the things the mystics uttered about the world they live in.

But still, his reaction seemed to be more than that! Was that about shame? Was that a sort of guilt?

Reading the book about Father Niphon he discovered himself in that history, with amazement, but also with spite, that he imparted himself quite enthusiastically with the feats that Great Saint of the Christendom did. But he, the Young Officer, he wasn’t a believer! Those feats were only fantasy! How came that he felt that friendship – he didn’t dare to think that that was love! – for Father Niphon?!...

And now there was Petre Țuțea! Who conquered him with such wonderful sayings, which he had nothing to reproached to!... The logics, the humor, the clarity... and the love the Genius talked to you... they were overwhelming!...

And about Father Niphon the book said: “Lo what he did!”, and this argument, by no means a theoretical one, it cannot be rejected.

He, the Young Officer, he always made a motif of pride out of the fact that he was raised to lead himself according to principles. But by reading those books, his comfortable principledness – principles spare you of thinking at and of finding unwonted solutions, for they establish from before the way you react in – it was now shaken by that attraction towards that something he couldn’t explain, and he felt the miss of it, and that was causing him unrest. In his conscience there was a struggle of pro and counter arguments; he hated his conscience back then, because he felt it was good only to

accuse him and to make him feeling guilty, but now it seemed that it abandoned him, by refusing to take a clear side, so that to put an end to the fight of the contraries from his mind and soul.

Before reading those books he was a happy man in his unconsciousness, bearing inside a serene soul. But now he ended to torment himself in order to find answers to some questions he never thought before he would ask... It seemed that the happiness and the serenity he had before they weren't enough any longer. Or maybe those happiness and serenity they wouldn't even have been what they seemed like, and he must search for happiness and for a serenity of another kind...

Finding no answers, he kept reading again and again the Genius's sayings, and he was overwhelmed by that torrent of thoughts and unrests those sayings caused him.

The most intriguing saying was this:

"Between believer and unbelieving, there is an abyss impossible to cross over."

"I know what side of that abyss I am on, he thought. But behold, and I cannot explain why!..., it seems I am enticed somehow to explore the other side. Only to listen what it has to say... Is this simple curiosity?!... This side where I am now, it makes me feel so lonely! Would I be ever able to believe these wonderful things which seem to be now as being simple fairytales?!... On the other hand, the most powerful argument I could ever found in the favor of the other side of the abyss is the fact that some people gave their own life for the truth they believed in, and some of them even endured prison, torture, and death!

There must be something I miss! I have to continue my search! But where to?!... And how?!..."

Motto: “Haec lex in amicitia sancitur, ut neque rogemus res turpes, neque faciamus rogati.”²⁵

Awakening 3 – You, Captain!...

In the assembly room there were crowded the Regiment’s personnel. The Command brought them all in there, because the General from the superior echelon it arrived and he wanted to speak to them. The subject of the discourse followed to be the military dignity and the corruption.

“You are letting yourself to be bought by a bottle of brandy!... Aren’t you ashamed?!...”

He, the Young Officer, he had never done that! Partially because his platoon was formed out of poor soldiers who had no material possibilities to bring him gifts – so that even if he was asked by some of his superiors to bring them his platoon’s “contribution”, he didn’t do it. But also because he was before becoming an officer, as poor as his soldiers were, and he felt the bitter taste of the injustice the unprincipled relationships are bringing it in.

That full of pathos discourse of that General, whose face was red because of effort and also because of the few glasses of whiskey he drank in the Commander’s office, before attending that meeting (of course that wasn’t unprincipled!... in his opinion that was something he deserved), it betrayed the pleasure he had for hearing himself speaking, and for nourishing his ego with the power he had over all those military.

After a while – those discourses usually lasted for a couple of hours, and they were like a courtroom in which the General was the inquirer, the prosecutor, and the judge all together... - a Captain stood up and respectfully waited for being notice and asked what he wanted.

When he noticed that Captain, the General started to stutter and, finally, he asked:

²⁵ Lat.: “This must be thoroughly guarded in friendship: neither to ask for shameful things, nor to do such things for our friends if we are asked to.”

“What’s the matter with you, Captain?!...”

The whole sleepy and deadly bored personnel – both states as reactions to the psychic constant aggression the General was exercising upon them – it suddenly become attentive, trying to see better, whispering for answers...

“Permission to speak, General, sir! You are wrong calling all of us as corrupts sir, because you must observe the benefit of doubt. I also ask you to observe the military regulations as we all do! – for they are an example of living democracy: they grant right but also obligations. So that when you address me, you also have to use the correct formula: “Captain” and not “You, Captain”... If you allow me, I personally believe that this “professionalization” of the Army you are speaking about, it is an empty concept, for we, the Militaries, we have never been “amateurs”. To us, being Military isn’t a hobby as you are trying to convince us. This slogan uttering that we need to become “professionals” it aims to manipulate us and to destroy our moral as officers! You are repeating it either because you do not understand its poisonous content, or intentionally! So that I am kindly asking you to stop using it! But if you want us to “increase our professionalism” - a concept always acceptable in all domains - let’s start by using all of us the regulatory addressing formula and manifesting the required respect!...”

The voice of the Captain started to be covered by the noise the personnel made. He catalyzed everybody’s discontents, because all they felt the same but hadn’t the courage of speak that out.

The General had his face so red that he seemed a boiled crawfish. He tried to reply, but his mouth, used to utter Stalinist discourses in front of scared assemblies of terrorized slaves, it was no longer capable of saying anything. He was in a shock state, because the scaffolding his discretionary power was built on, that power that the old communist regime granted him because he “corresponded to the requirements”, no longer had any base to lean on.

The Commander intervened and spared the General of more humiliation and grabbed him by the arm and despite the General tried to resist him, the Commander pulled the General

out of that room. Their leaving was accompanied by laughter and applause.

He, the Young Officer, he finally understood that saying of Petre Țuțea:

“When the crowd refuses to obey the Tyrant any longer, he falls.”

He saw that the Power that lack the understanding and love, it is only an illusory power.

A couple of years later, that General was offered the possibility to retire earlier, in order to escape being dishonored and thrown in prison – because he used the Brigade’s qualified workers for renovating the villa he was granted by the communist regime for the duration of his service and which he bought it for the new regime granted him this possibility. But he didn’t pay those workers, and he used them like kind of forced labor, and he ordered them to be absent from their units in order to work at his villa, and he even forged some documents which to cover the entire operation...

Hypocrisy increases with the power and with the things you can lose... Slowly but surely, on your way up to the world’s domination, you start believing that you are allowed to do things generally forbidden by a civilized society, things which you condemn when you see them done by the average people. You power corrupts you and your mind falls in deep hypocrisy and Pharisaism.

Such sorts of behaviors made him craving for finding landmarks, models, because the troubled times he was living in caused his certitudes to disintegrate.

“Will I found something essential, something ultimate, something unchanging and good, out of which to learn what and how to live my life, according to which to guide each and every of my steps?...”

Motto: “Medician calamitatis est aequanimitas.”²⁶

Sign 2 – Seagull

He barely succeeded to catch that Seagull! Though that bird had a wounded right wing, it still tried to escape him by flying some sort of broken flight that made him raising only a little above the ground and then to fall to the left. Those “jumps” of almost two meters in length ended quite quickly because of the tiredness.

He bandaged the Seagull’s wing and blocked it from moving by using some makeshift splints made of two school rulers; the one from beneath the wing was grey, and the one from above the wing was white. He was feeding him by placing in a little tray filled with water, small pieces of salami, with the intention to instigate the hunting instinct of that wild bird.

During the first days of its healing process, the general condition of that bird seemed to rapidly deteriorating. It was eating increasingly rarely, and then it totally stopped eating. He tried to feed the Seagull by forcedly introducing the food in its mouth and then making it swallowing, as he saw his grandma was doing with the ducks she was forcedly fattening them up. But the Seagull constantly refused it.

He prepared for the worst. That night he checked once every hour the state of the Seagull. That one was breathing with difficulty and its nostrils were oozing out a whitish liquid.

Early morning he heard from the place where the Seagull was kept, some commotion. When he got there, the Seagull was jumping all around. Its wing was still hanging down but the general condition of the bird seemed dramatically improving. The bandage was no longer in place and he didn’t put it back again. The only thing he did was to get that bird in the balcony, in the attempt to prevent the whole apartment to be ruined, and because in the balcony there was more light.

After around four weeks, the bird seemed healed, but still keeping that wing in an unnatural position, hanging

²⁶ Lat.: “The medicine for a misfortune it is the reconciliation of the soul.”

downwards. His impression was that that bird was unable to fly again. So that they started keep the balcony's windows open. There was summer and keeping those window closed meant to create inside a suffocating heat.

The months passed routinely. One day, checking the balcony, he saw the Seagull was no longer there.

He hurried down stairs and searched all over the neighborhood: there was nothing! He asked the children who were playing there if they saw something. They answered that they don't... That Seagull simply vanished!

His human efforts for saving Seagull's life seemed to be vain. Then the rational prediction he made that that Seagull was dying, it again proved to be wrong...

And that mysterious disappearance was a sign letting him choose what to believe!

Motto: “Quod nimis probat nihil probat?”²⁷

Octagon 1 – Urban Hermit

“My father in law is reading that book you are asking about. Its author is Petru Culianu, isn’t him?”

“Yes, that’s correct. If he finished the book, could you kindly ask him if he can lend it to me? I will be grateful to read it. I couldn’t find it anywhere...”

He mentioned that book by chance, while discussing about the fact that his reading preferences started shifting towards the secretive, towards occult, mystical, and initiatory doctrines. He was constantly searching for something, but he had no clue what that Something was!²⁸ He only felt he wasn’t content with his life as it was going on, quite good from material and familiar point of view; he was chased by a permanent feeling that he was craving for Something unclear...

By analyzing himself retrospectively, he became aware of the fact that he was ever since he was a child, he was searching for and wanting that Something that is above usual.

While he was practicing Hatha Yoga, he read all he could find relating to the other Yoga disciplines, and it seemed to him that he found the Way. Meditation and physical exercises were giving him a particular satisfaction. He felt himself proud of being able to perform those asanas, bandhas, and mudras, which were so difficult to be executed even by the well trained and experienced yogi.

Then he got bored - maybe towards his luck – because he no longer found anything to add to that “occult” knowledge. He reached a dead end and he clearly saw he had no direction to further progress in.

So that he enthusiastically started to practice martial arts. He passed from wrestling to jiu-jitsu and karate, but he suddenly stopped studying them. The reason why that took

²⁷ Lt.: “What proves too many, it proves nothing.”

²⁸ “You wouldn’t have been searching for Me, if you wouldn’t have already found Me.”

place, it was that they didn't satisfy his permanent spiritual thirst.

So that he started reading everything related to the Supreme Knowledge, from philosophy to stories about the life of the Tibetan monks.

And so he was in the house of that man, who was probably curious to find out what preoccupations had the young man introduced to him, preoccupations which seemed to be so unfitted to the consumerist – savage society they were living in.

When he, the Young Man, he ringed the interphone, the heavy metallic gate opened, and he saw that dark and swept by wind corridor, leading towards an small interior yard, where were a four garages. In the grass before those garages there was a grey and fluffy cat, playing lazily with a dove feather.

He passed through that dark corridor and then turned to the left, he climbed that two stairs and passed through that wooden double door; beyond that old door there was waiting for him, smiling, that man who he was searching for.

That man smiled at him and watched him with a piercing look that x-rayed him.

Once inside, he, the Young Man, he was invited to sit at that square table where the host usually received him visitors. He was left to wait for a couple of minutes while the red wine was brought to the table and the little plate with peanuts was placed next to the glass of wine. The host brought form himself a special glass with a red liquid: "I drink only wild rose tea".

"Culianu is quite wrong... It is transparent in his writings his desire to become somebody, at all costs, and that's why he shocks. I would compare him, in what concerns his self-seeking, to Emil Cioran. By the way, do you know that, towards the end of his life, "rumors are" that Cioran felt himself bad about the manner he attacked God and he asked himself and others if he still could be forgiven...."

"Țuțea says about Cioran that he was very intelligent, but he lacked the quality of being comforting..."

The host was pleasantly surprised by this observation. So, the Young Man was indeed preoccupied with the things of the Knowledge...

“You see, I studied philosophy. In the fourth year of college they threw me out... because they discovered my true identity. I was a Refugee from Bucovina... and the Stalinists Soviets hunted and oppressed the Romanian Refugees everywhere they could... and Romania was back then occupied by Soviet Communist Russians... Philosophy, maybe I am thinking now like Aesop’s fox, it is a method of wasting your time!...

If I let behind the resentments caused to me by the fact that I was forced by the communists to interrupt my studies, I will reformulate my previous assertion and I would say that the Philosophy is useful only to them who are searching for a rational way towards God. But not because such a way would be possible to find, but just for that playing of “love for wisdom” it ends to convince them of the inutility of their attempt. And then, some of them try to philosophy on God, as Heidegger for instance, or as Eliade in “The Sacred and the Profane”, and some of them, luckier, they reach what Petre Țuțea – It seems that you care very much of him – called: “I disinfested myself of Philosophy, but I am still using its means”.

“On Culianu I read the book of an American author who tries – in a newspaper article’s style, or of a detective story – to clarify the mystery of his death. The respective author succeeds in describing with realism Culianu’s struggle with the System, his great ambition to accomplish himself in the West and on the other side of the Ocean, where, despite his competences and his tireless work, he lived in quite modest conditions, from material point of view.

His friendship with Mircea Eliade didn’t help him too much. The Great Professor of History of the religions avoided him, maybe trying to defend himself against that “star” promising a lightning ascent, and who could possibly rewrite the hierarchy existing in the History of the Religions at that time...”

“It is almost impossible to accept the fact that others can be better than you are, especially when you are so great like Eliade was. But Culianu didn’t last enough in order to flourish in the whole splendor of a mature inflorescence, because the ax cut off, too early, his life’s stem.

And there one can see another phenomenon which is by no means a stranger one. After a certain age, it is very difficult to you to get involved in relationships other than superficially, be it that relationship even a strictly professional one. I am not going to parade in front of you with that affirmation from The Romanian Philokalia – for I am not going to decorate the basis of my “statue” with it, either – but: “Knowledge makes you alone”. Seriously, in the first place, the Life makes you to be alone! And then, there come the unpleasant experiences, the sufferings, the mistrust – for you have been hit for too many times and you have been disappointed in all the possible ways –, and, to be honest all the way to the end, there is also the envy: all of these make you isolate yourself in your ivory tower.

Some people, being a little less sensitive, or having a sick need to be praised, they launch themselves within world, searching for ovations and applauds but, actually, they isolate themselves right in the middle of those praises and ovations and applauses right in the middle of their adulators, by judging them according to the manner they applaud or not, but being, in fact, no longer capable to really communicate with those...”

During their discussion he, the Young Man, he noticed that special perfume the whole chamber was filled with, that fragrance he couldn't describe otherwise than “a smell of a good fragrance”...

When speaking, the voice of the one whom he labeled “The Urban Hermit”, it sometimes vanished, like a withdrawal, like a self-humbling, becoming almost a whisper, melting amongst thought. And then coming back with even more clarity...

“So, you have noticed this defect of my voice... It is one more motif that has been determining me to adopt an isolated attitude, ever since my childhood... It made me not to like to be in the center of the attention... But it isn't only about my voice. My nature has built my like that... my Mother never showed me any affection, despite the fact that she loved me very, very much. But she couldn't express that.

I watched her dying, taking vigil next to her bed, during the last hours she lived. All the others fell to tiredness, for the sufferance of my Mother was a very long one. Maybe this

happens to the people who let too many unsolved things during their life...

I couldn't tell whether she suffered or not... From time to time she had short periods of some kind of consciousness, but without noticing our presence...

My soul was drowning in the tears I shed inside myself, but I couldn't share any outside me. As, probably, she would have done too!...

I wrote in those moments a page of notebook describing what I was feeling then. I was afraid by the fact of not being able to suffer enough... later, when I became totally aware of the fact that I lost her, by reading what I wrote, to be able to cauterize, through sufferance, my helplessness of manifesting myself emotionally..."

"What's your relation with God? You seem to be very familiar with the religion!..."

"Sadly, what I am about to tell you it is not too honorable to me... I haven't reached yet - and not because I haven't been trying so hard to fight myself! - to the courage of totally "Abandoning" myself to Him... Of course I accept His existence probably more than the majority of the one calling, themselves, Christians. But I started to suffer since my childhood, because ever since I was four years old, I have been trying to be in control of what has been happening to me, and that's why I am so afraid of giving up control..."

So, I am, somehow, on the edge of the knife... I am searching for the gates of the Kingdom but I have no courage to knock, with enough conviction, in order to be opened to me...

By the way, regarding the sufferance, I have this lung disease that kept me in hospitals for years. When coughing, I was spitting out blood clots... Those so long staying in hospitals, the loneliness, and the things I saw there - in that antechamber of death - accustomed me to the pain, to the illness... The fact of physically suffering, it no longer impresses me too much..."

"Were you afraid of death?"

"Of course I was, who wouldn't?!... Especially at the beginning! The children were too small... The material situation wasn't too good... but I understood that Death isn't something we can control... And then I tried to appease myself by

meditating to that Tibetan proverb: "If a problem can be solved, there is no point in being worried about it. And if a problem cannot be solved, what is the point in being worried about it?!..."

"Father Archimandrite Ilie Cleopa says that death is the best friend we have..."

He, the Young Man, he noticed those ornamental shrubs, which were almost reaching the ceiling. That green was so intense that he was fascinated by it.

"I wash their leaves, one by one, I feel they like it. I feel they are grateful for the care I take of them. Take, for instance, the lemon tree, it produces lemons almost all the year around, bearing concomitantly flowers and fruits..."

"You told me that you are a refugee from Bucovina. Have you ever turned back there since you have left?"

"My children brought me there. I entered my village carrying a "Passport"! That made me quite sad... but, you know, I didn't find there the atmosphere I lost when leaving... fleeing from Soviet Russians. One can see there, quite clearly the results of the Russification!

And there is one more important thing to be told! What do you believe the people remaining behind were doing with the properties of the ones who flew away? They entered their houses and plundered everything they could. After they were convince the refugees weren't coming back, they even took those ones' households. And this didn't happen only in Bucovina! This happens everywhere in the world!

The idealistic movement of the literary peasantry it has created a protochronism, a false aura to the peasant. That must be rejected. The peasant isn't either better or worse than any other social category. He is simply a man, with human passions and sins. He is humble with his masters but he is harsh with the widows and orphans. He is welcoming, but he also hits you on the head when he is drunk and something seemed to him...

I think one of the biggest mistakes of the world it is the fact that people generalize too much! People must be taken as individuals. One is good, another is bad. But when put together, who could say what they are going to be like?!...

I felt myself at peace when I saw the graves of my Grand Parents were still here, in that small cemetery on that small hill at the end of the village. Those Crosses eroded by snows, by sun, by rains, and by wind, they lost their inscriptions. But I still knew they were there and I found them without hesitating at all, like I wouldn't have left that village ever.

I didn't find, though, the parental house, because it had been demolished in the seventies, and another building was erected on its place.

Those people living there, they looked at us with mistrust. Their impression was that we came to claim our property back from them.

They were unable to understand that our belongings, our property, they were in our soul and I wouldn't have exchanged what I was carrying within my being – and which were, and they still are, an essential part of who I am – for nothing in the world!"

The Urban Hermit leaned his head on his hands and kept his silence for a while. He, the Young Man didn't dare to disturb him... he was studying with the corner of his eye the sadness's shadows which were chasing one another on his tormented face.

He, the Young Man, he understood that the man in front of him chose to be alone because he was disappointed by everybody and everything, but mainly because he didn't find the answers to the questions which were tormenting him.

His isolation was not a show; that man wasn't a pretender in searching for an interesting pose. In the same time that isolation wasn't one which to make him socially dysfunctional. He rather had built up around himself a defense wall, around his soul, and he rarely let somebody enter within it. And even the few fortunate people being granted the privilege of entering that sad palace, they could only access a few carefully selected chambers. But nobody was allowed to enter his inner inside.

"Please allow me now, to leave. I will bring your book back in a few days, after reading it..."

"Of course; please excuse me! I hope I wasn't out there for too long!... You know, it very rarely happens to me to find somebody to be able to be silent with!..."

Motto: “Magnas iter opes opnes inops.”²⁹

Paradise 7 – Deer Feeder

His brother was about to sit the baccalaureate exam. That spring the nature's life desire exploded in a luxuriant vegetation of a raw, fresh green. Fragrances of freshly cut grasses were spreading on long distances and were perfuming the air around the hayfields.

Bored because of so much studying, his brother grabbed a book and asked him to go together to that area they were calling “The Territory”. This comprised amongst other things, a deserted orchard within which, starting with the June days, one could find all sorts of fruits - unripe or ripe - the children usually stuffed themselves with.

They passed forwards and entered the deciduous forest, one promising to lead them to some hidden water spring. The whole valley was engulfed by tall fern bushes, and it was also guarded on both sides by huge oak trees.

For so many times they crossed through that forest area, but they never descended in that valley dug by torrents. This time they were stepping in a world hinting towards that enigmatic Cretaceous era. It was a window in time there; actually, it was a time outside the time; there they entered the eternity... He, The Boy, he recalled, without remembering where he had read it, the quote: “Where and when God speaks, the time keeps its silence”...

A thick layer of moss was silencing their steps, so that the unreal quietude surrounding them, it was interrupted, from time to time, only by the Far Cry of some bird which, seeing them, it was noticing their arrival.

Fully immersed within that strange atmosphere, the two boys were advancing in silence, paying attention to every move. From the thick bushes hundreds of eyes seemed to look at them. Actually, that whole corner of nature was giving them the impression of seeing them, of attentively watching them, of

²⁹ Lat.: “Poor amidst so much richness.”

receiving them within itself, by being fully aware of their presence, like some kind of living Church. They were in the presence of a conscious vegetal soul, within which everything was merging in order to ascend towards beyond, towards above.

Suddenly, as they crossed beyond the fern bushes, there opened in front of them a glade, and in the middle of it there was a small hill, on which there was built a Deer Feeder, full with last year hay - almost rotten but yet not.

They climbed that little hill and got up on that Deer Feeder, which was built up of quite thick trunks of young locust trees.

That hay smelled so good, and that almost material quietude, gathered like pure water, in the surrounding valley, it isolated that little hill from the general unrest of the world.

His brother opened the book and started reading the texts for his exam. He, the Young Boy leaned against one of the Deer Feeder's pillars, and fell prey to a pleasant drowsiness. All those things seemed somehow familiar to him...

Through the rare branches from around that glade the sunlight was being sifted in golden glitters and, when the light breeze moves the trees, those light stains seemed to chase on each other.

He suddenly remember where he seemed to know that atmosphere from... It was about that little wooden Church of the village he was living in, where, from time to time he accompanied his grandma. There he was usually leaning against the entrance pillar - made of thick oak beam - and, when the bell was ringed, he felt like the whole Church was a living whale, moving to the from the left to the right, and swallowing that multitude of Jonahs, in order to bring them to the Shore...

And that illuminated little hill in the center of that Living Church, it seemed to be the Altar, where their childish innocence and purity was being celebrated like a Nature's Liturgy.

It was about afternoon and thick clouds gathered on the sky. The light was no longer there and a grey and gloomy world was surrounding them. It seemed that the Spirit left that part of nature letting it to be taken over by materialness and decay.

The boys started descending that little hill and they came across with a heap of rotten wood, some of it almost disintegrated; some sort of black sand was pouring out of them...

A small branch from that pile of wood seemed to move. He, the Young Boy got closer and he froze. Amongst these pieces of rot, he started to see in that semi-darkness, hundreds of snakes coiling up with each other, crossing through that rotten matter like some worms through a rotten man's body.

He felt how that hidden living power of the nature goes ahead, immortal, while leaving behind dead matter and time that passed. He felt, for the first time, like a cold shiver, his own mortality.

**Motto: “Omnia in rebus humanitas dubia, incerta, suspensa
magisque omnia verisimilia quam vera.”³⁰**

Banishing 6 – Battalion

“Second Lieutenant, alarm!” said him that agent, a soldier sweating all over, and then disappeared leaving behind a gruesome stench of boots, and socks, and clothes, and body... and him, whose long exercised mechanisms – automatisms by now – made him put rapidly on the uniform and to start running towards Regiment...

Good to him that there it was a beautiful evening of May, warm but not quite, so that that running on foot to the Military Unit was enough easy regarding the “meteorological conditions”.

“Go, all of you, to the headquarters building! You are going to find there the reason why you have been summoned!”

The officer on duty on the Regiment didn’t give them any detail. He seemed quite affected by something – “or maybe he has some personal problems” thought many. But they were about to see that they were the ones having problems.

Soon they noticed that not all the personnel were summoned to the Regiment, but only a couple of hundreds of them – of all ages and specialties... But those were almost the same with the ones who participated to that big scale military exercise, with reserve people, from the previous year... when...

“Damn it, captain! You have just made me to throw myself to the ground and seek for shelter under that armored carrier!”, joked the Regiment’s Commander, that one who was the Chief of Staff during the Revolution. The former Commander left; in fact he was removed and appointed elsewhere to be somehow hidden from the sight of the public, because many people were accusing him for many things...

The Regiment’s Commander was dusting off his uniform, which was until then impeccable. He threw himself on

³⁰ Lat.: “Regarding the human things, all of them are doubtful, uncertain, undecided, and rather verisimilar than true.”

his belly under an armored carrier because a grenade fired by a launcher fell in their close proximity, under a hundred meters from their position. The base plate of the grenades launcher wasn't fixed properly by the reserve militaries forming that group and, the little explosion pushing the grenade out it changed the angle of the barrel.

A sharp, harsh, and killer hiss – of the bomb falling down on them – it made them all seek for shelter anywhere they could.

He, the Young Officer, he ran away, hopelessly, down that valley full with blackberry brambles. The sharp thorns tore apart the fabric of his trousers from above his boots and cut his skin on his shins. When that whistling was too close he threw himself in a ditch...

Nobody got hurt, so the exercise continued a nothing would have happened. Everybody was shooting from all positions war ammunition of all calibers. The grenade launchers were firing over that village. The antitank rocket propelled grenade launchers were hitting the plywood targets mimicking tanks and armored vehicles. At almost a kilometer distance, the armored carriers were roaring by firing their heavy machineguns. The infantry personnel were firing all the individual guns they had. It was almost war...

The Regiment's attack formation was advancing upwards the first hill, followed by the command and by all the other personnel from that shooting range. The combat simulation actions took the whole morning. By the noon they all were hungry and thirsty. The charm of the power given by the combat gave place to the "domestic" realities... Some of the military had blisters full with yellowish liquid and blood, on their soles and especially on their heels. Some of them fainted because of heat and exhaustion. Some of them suffered twisted ankles due to the harsh terrain they were walking on. But all of them, even the commanders, they were apathetic because of hunger and thirst.

A pause was ordered and they were given a plate of beans and a piece of black bread. The people ate, they took care of their wounds, and then they crashed in the shadow and some of them fell to sleep. But that happiness didn't last for too long. A rumor, like the enemy would have wanted to confuse

them and to lower their moral, it started to spread amongst, like a breeze announcing a storm. Actually, nobody understood what was happening.

The terrain vehicles of the staff were hurrying upwards and downwards on those hills and nobody told the fighting personnel anything.

Finally, an order was issued and conveyed to all the people there:

“Let everybody to makeshift “brooms” out of bushes! The exercise ceases immediately!” – The foresters from there told them and begged them, before the exercise started, not to shoot because the forest was too dry and wildfires was imminent...

It was too late for lamentations or for any kind of regrets. They set in motion towards the area where a strong wildfire was raging. From far they could see a huge grey cloud of smoke. Here and there, like an incendiary bomb, a fir tree lit up explosively, from bottom to top in a matter of seconds, becoming, almost instantaneously, a torch.

Like almost everything in that Communist era, the improvisation was present also there. They hadn't any training in tackle wildfires. They had no plan for attack or for escape, and they didn't know the terrain and the access or escape routes.

All the people there started to hit the flames with the makeshift brooms they made. Their effort was in vain, of course, but the bosses wanted to be able to report that “they are doing something”... The soil of that forest area was totally covered in a few centimeters of ashes and burning coals. The boots' soles of the personnel were melting down when stepping on that “fiery blanket”. They tried to cover their faces with the left hand – because the heat was too high – and to hit the flames with the right hand wielding those bramble brooms. They felt the heat crossing through their clothes and cooking their skin.

Enthusiastic as always, he, The Young Officer, decided to blindly follow the orders, so that in the next days he suffered from the first degree burns he had on his face and on his hands.

But back then, after a few hours of toiling, all of them grew convinced that there was nothing to be done. The personnel from that area gathered at the foot of that hill, on a road crossing that valley. That was a bad move, because of the smoke that was accumulating down there and all of them were in danger to choke with it.

But staying on that hill was and even worse choice. The fire started from the right side and, pushed by the stormy wind, it was quickly approaching a subunit caught there. Desperate to escape, they started running through a thicket that was totally covering a small crevasse probably formed in years by torrents of water, during the rainy seasons. On top of that thicket there were dry ivy leaves and a fabric of small bines interwoven in a net like cover.

To add even more danger to all of that, the militaries were carrying with them their individual armament on their backs... The panic made them running and pushing away each other in order to escape; some of them entangled the barrels of their submachine guns in the vines of the bushes and fell down. The platoon commander was the last in line, trying to make sure that everyone escaped beyond. And the flames were raging at less than a hundred of meters from there... The upwards currents of warm air were taking firebrands and scattered them at distance, causing new outbreaks.

By the skin of the tooth, those militaries arrived on the other side of that little valley when that thicket exploded in flames. A piece of firebrand landed on that very dry leaves and bushes and it immediately set it in fire. Being on a valley and also because of the weather conditions, a funnel effect propelled the fire from the foot of that valley to the top of it in a matter of seconds.

A second later and all those militaries would have died burnt and suffocated!

They, the personnel participating to that exercise, they didn't know that those adventures were actually a "test" destined to verify their abilities and skills, in order to be selected to be part of the tragedy unfolding on that May evening.

“You are appointed in the position of Chief of the NBRC Protection at the battalion... dislocate in the town...! Here you have your mission order! Do you have anything to report?!...”

“But, sir, my family... my house...”

“If you are discontent, present your resignation! Dismissed!”

“Next in line!...”

There was already night when he was summoned in the office of the Regiment’s Chief of Staff. After receiving his order, he, the Young Officer, he didn’t know what to do. Almost nobody knew where that town was and how they were to arrive there. There was also another officer he was living on the same apartments block with. They arrived to the Regiment in the same year and made friendship, and now they were to suffer together again.

So, they gathered together the necessary information and then they planned to go together, the next morning, in the attempt to find that unit they were appointed to.

The Communism destroys any respect for the human right. People are only a crowd the individuals are merged in. The State is the Absolute Master, and impersonal Master situated above all and everything, using regardless its citizens. Even the few people at the power lose their freedom. Paranoia casts them in prisons made by themselves. In order to defend the State they use force – often unnecessarily –, the brutality, the killings, the secret services, the lie, and the worst possible manipulation. The Communism invents several enemies: the other peoples, the Church, the freedom of speech, the individual freedom, the individual as such... The more the Communist State fears his citizens the more violent it manifests upon them. And there is no Communist State not to fear dreadfully its own citizens!...

Of course they were militaries and, receiving an order, they must fulfill it! But what was the war there?!...

What weren’t they provided with collective transportation means, and shown the way to their new unit for?!... Was that harshness destined to impede a rebellion?!... Refusing the due respect – actually, any kind of respect! –, was it considered as a form of reinforcing the authority?!...

Behaving like any human care it was a sign of weakness, was it good for the moral of the newly formed unit?!...

Early morning on that day, around five o'clock, the two Young Officers were going on foot, in alert rhythm, that distance of around five kilometers from their homes to the main rail station of the City. That regular shuttle train for commuters it was leaving an hour later and they must catch it because otherwise they would have been severely punished.

After a while that daily commuting it changed them. Immediately they got into the carriages, they crushed on the seats – when they could find one – and tried to sleep, silently cursing the people who were having something to “discuss” at that early hour in the morning.

The trip to their unit it usually took an hour and a half. Arrived to the destination, in that small rail station, they started running towards the Battalion, because on each day the program started at eight sharp, and they had less than ten minutes for gearing up and for presenting themselves on the plateau for the morning official counting.

Retrospectively thinking, it seems that all the things had been destined to a sole purpose: terrorizing the personnel in order to keep their mouths shut and blindly obey the stupid orders...

On the plateau they were waited for by the Battalion's Commander, an old officer with no much education, usually already drunk at that hour (... that one was later granted the brigadier general rank too ...), whose only attribution seemed to be to shout out at them and to constantly offend them and terrorize them.

Sometimes all the personnel were late, not because they wanted to, but because of the trains' tardiness... What were they held accountable because of the train's tardiness for?!... He, the Commander, had at his disposal a military terrain vehicle to bring him to work and to take him at home, on a daily basis. And if he was late, who was to ask him about it?...

He, the Young Officer, he thought the abuses will be gone once the new Capitalism Regime was in place. The Democracy's apologists were praising the rule of the law... but, how could people raised in Communism and having Communist Mentality be able to understand the rule of the

law, the human rights... etc? Of course everybody wanted his rights to be respected, but they had not the slightest intention to respect the rights of their subordinates... It maybe wasn't totally their fault... The education provides, first of all, a thinking apparatus which is, in a way, beyond and above the individual. All his actions are determined by the education he was provided with.

Really speaking, at the new job, he, the Young Officer, he had to work only for a couple of hours. There was not so much work to do. But that commuting for almost four hours a day – considering in that time also the morning walking and the tramway commuting, in the evening – it was slowly but surely destroying them all. Because of being forced to wear uniform all the time, and because the equipment was scarce – because the Army was underfinanced – all of them became greasy. That filth from the trains passed on their uniforms...

But not only personnel's uniforms got a worn out look. The personnel's attitude became of a low sort too. Their attitude changed in one characteristic to the commuters. They were cursing, they were talking filthy, and they were drinking in those trains and in the departure and destination rails stations...

Daily commuting wasn't enough! A new rule was introduced. They were asked once every three days to remain 24 hour at the unit. The next day they continued the usual program, so that a work shift counted thirty six hours. The official reason was that the unit must be capable to leave in three hour time when ordered and to defend the border situate forty kilometers from there.

For that additional working time they never got paid or given compensation time. The slogan, having Communist origins, was that the militaries are paid twenty four hours of twenty for and seven days a week...

That new rule was part of the "strategy" of the ones who thought and put in place the new Battalion, in order to determine the personnel to move in the town where their new unit was dislocated; with or without families!

In time, tens of divorces took place because the strain on the families was too high and they didn't make it to

overcome it. Did the leadership care? Not at all! A divorce was to them a subject of gossip, laughter, and mockery.

Of course nobody cared of where the personnel were to sleep... or what they were to eat... or how were they to solve their families' problems...

He, the Young Officer, he was usually sleeping in the conference room. According to the mood he was in, he had two variants, both of them equally bad: sleeping on three chairs brought next to each other, but those chairs was totally uncomfortable, or on two tables, but those table had a metallic edge and they were covered in a shiny lacquer coat, making them to be so cold regardless there was summer or winter.

People started to speak against. The knife reached the bones. Some of them tried to "avenge" themselves by leaving for the town – despite they were formally forbidden to! –, and drinking together with the scum of the society.

Few of them, despite being menaced, they even "dared" to formulate written application to be moved back home, no matter of what the position they were to be appointed to.

One day, three Generals appeared there, he, the young officer, he noticed their huge hats, place on the top of their bald heads, and their faces red with angry and because of drinking, and their huge bellies...

The whole personnel was summoned in the conference room and waited there for more than an hour... It must be mentioned here that, according to the Communist manners, the higher one official's rank was, the longer you must wait for him, even you was ordered a precise time to be there. That conference room had no air conditioning, the hygiene conditions were poor for the personnel who stayed there since the previous morning, to that it started stinking inside there.

"Stand up! They are coming!"

It would have been better not to come! All three General had the same discourse, composed by some repeated phrases, pronounced with enmity, with hatred. They were rebuking and offending the insignificant and miserable personnel from there, who, due to their "military education", they didn't dare to answer back.

"From here nobody leaves! - shouted out all the three Generals. If you want to leave, you have three variants: in that

cemetery from across the road (there was indeed the town's cemetery, on the other side of the road, in the front of the Battalion...), to retirement, or by resigning. Is that clear?"

"Permission to speak, general, sir! – dared an older officer who had little time left to his retirement. Why couldn't we benefit of transportation with the Battalion's buses, in the conditions we would pay the fuel?.."

"Get out! You imbecile! - shouted out a General. And then he asked the Battalion's Commander: Who's this stupid?! Check him and if necessary, we'll throw him out of Army!"

Then, as for avoiding another "rebellion" that meeting started to be a continual threatening, being repeated again and again that post-revolutionary slogan/menace: "Whether you don't agree, then resign!"...

Amongst those three General there was also the "Raven" – he was nicknamed like that according to his codename the Soviets gave him when recruiting him like a spy... who didn't succeeded to surrender the Country to the Russians during the Revolution as he had his mission of fucking Spy, and for which he was appointed by another fucking Russian Spy, who was appointed as President during the same Revolution, and who also tried to surrender the Country to the Russians! Both of them, the Civilian and the General graduated the Russian Academy during the Communist Era.

It must be mentioned here that they were opposed by another General, who replied to the request of both of them:

"What have the Russians to do with us? Fuck them all! No Russian is required! We can manage our Country!"

That General was later irradiated and died in unclear circumstances...

But that general in front of them, the "Raven" was telling them:

"And you will see! All of you, you won't be able to occupy any command position because of having your military schools graduated during the communist era! And in a few years, all of you, who don't know the English language, you will be thrown out of Army!" –, and other inept things like these... Was him trying to destabilize even more the troop's moral?! Of course he was!

He, the Young Officer, he couldn't believe it! He learnt French and Russian in school. What was him to do? Of course at that time he was considering the General like some demigods, and he would have never questioned any of their words! He later understood that climbing to "high positions" - in profession or in society - it makes you playing the role of the "examining teacher" when you are "applying a certain measure". You have all the answers to that test so that you end up to believing to could easily tick in all the correct variants. You have the chronometer, so that your power upon the sportsmen is an absolute one - not to mention here that you can cheat them if you had the interest to. You do not fall under the law/rule you just issued and, the most often it makes you feel the pleasure of having such a power and superiority upon others. The more they suffer because of you, the more you feel a greater pleasure...

Just after that stormy meeting establishing the unbreakable rule that nobody was going to be moved an where else, two twin brothers, fresh graduated from Military School, by breaking all the possible rules - even that written one in the Regulation, mentioning that nobody can be moved, for any reason, before spending at least a whole year in his first unit he was appointed to! - were granted the permission to move in their birth City. Their father was a big boss in the newly installed regime.

Once more, the Justice was one, but not the same for everybody!...

The passing years transformed their attitude and the giving up it was the way of living for the most of the personnel from there. They were drowning themselves in drink, in laziness, and in degradation.

The Commander slipped increasingly deeply into drunkenness and into evilness. He was summoning them to the official noon counting, a quarter of an hour before the train was to leave the rail station, and he was mumbling something totally unintelligible, until the train left. Then he went to the military terrain vehicle and left for home, leaving the personnel contemplating two possibilities: one was to run towards the second rail station that town had in order to reach there in time for the next train leaving an hour and a half later, or to

remain that day in the Battalion, and deprive your family of your presence... The Abuse, lo, it was a “Military Practice”!

Because of constantly being submitted to that pressure and strain, without having any leverage to defend themselves against it – many of them regretted the “times when the “Communist Party” was defending you; that was only an appearance, but people grab any possibility to comfort themselves... - a wide majority of the personnel sold their houses they had in the City and moved to that Town. There was no help from the Military, no strategy, not anything! The personnel were left to survive in the artificially – and as we are going to see a little further, uselessly – created conditions, by their own self.

Regretting the Communist Era was justified on some extent! Even under terror, there were rules. You obeyed the commands, you suffered, you endured, but you had a relative certitude. Things were somehow predictable.

In the newly Savage Capitalism Era there were no rules. Corruption affecting in a hidden manner the Communist Society, it was now on plain sight. Abuses of a few had been replaced with the abuses of the many.

The majority of the Personnel had nice apartments in the City. Because there suddenly appeared such a big offer – almost two hundred or apartments were to sell – they sold them way under the usual price. In the same time, in that small Town two hundred of families were searching for place to stay, in the same time. The prices skyrocketed! Some of the personnel sold their houses in the City, and with the money they got they weren’t able to buy something in exchange in the Town. So they rented some places at astronomical prices! Weren’t the “Strategists of the Army” aware of such an evolution?! Yes they were, but they didn’t give a shit!

Even worst, the personnel who sold their apartments in the City and no longer were able to buy another place in the Town, they had the uninspired idea to bet their money on a pyramidal scheme newly brought in by the Savage Capitalism – nobody had no idea, back then, what a pyramidal scheme meant - and nobody informed them with the reality and no one advised them not to “play” that “game”. Not to mention that the secret services, the police, the prosecutors, the judges, the

lawmakers, all of them should have impede that deceit, but no one did. Important politicians from Capital City sent important sums of money and they took in the same day eight times the “invested” sums. And some of them sent nothing, but they took important sums of money as protection fee.

Average people were submitted to such a heavy informational bombardment!

The end result of the disastrous human resources policy was the breaking of tens of families, and many others lost their livelihood. Everything in the name of that disastrous Stalinist Philosophy!

Were they Generals to be prosecuted and judged at least for abuse in fulfilling their official duties? Of course they had to! But they never were!

And quite so, why am I not to learn English?!... – he thought one day... All that time he was losing it vainly while staying in the caserne for thirty six hours and doing nothing, it was actually an opportunity to increase his level of preparedness and of education.

After a year he progressed quite nicely. His main method of accumulating, he was also practicing at home, it was to set the TV on a news channel broadcasting in English, repeating again and again the same news. The volume was set at the lowest audible limit, so that he could even sleep without being bothered by it. After a while he noticed that he was recognizing English words he never understood before.

He, the Young Officer, he almost ceased fearing of being kicked out the Army because of not knowing English, for he reached to make his point quite clear, while there were ninety percent of the other personnel not being able to articulate a word in Shakespeare’s language.

“If they kick me off, than they will have to kick everybody off! Eh, well, this is not true for the people having relations in high places...” -, he thought.

His Country had recently been admitted as part of NATO. Integration meant, amongst other things, the “taking in custody” of the Army by its former enemies. The first step a Defeated Army is submitted to, it is that of counting its tanks, its armored carriers, its guns, its armaments, its ammunition, its personnel... and everything. The next step is that of

reducing the Defeated Army's strength to the limit the Victors, the new Masters, established.

Prepared like for a great celebration, the Battalion was waiting for being humiliated by the control commission of the allies.

The commission was late, because they had been retained by the Superior Echelon to for "lunch", almost forcedly, using the ineptitude expressed by the words: "our people are welcoming" not knowing anything about the cultural shock and about the cultural differences...

The representatives of the new mastery, they endured with stoicism the "love" and the excessive flattering, perhaps also because they had been informed about it. But that didn't mean that they would have been regarded them as "positive"!

They had come here with a precise purpose: to institute the NATO's control upon a Defeated Army from a military-political block that was their enemy. No more, no less! We don't call that Army as national, because it was subservient to the communist doctrine and to Ceausescu's will, and not to the nation.

Members of the commission, each one fulfilling the task he was appointed to, they recorded very attentively the chassis numbers of the tanks, of the armored carriers, of those jalopies of military trucks still in use, of the guns from seventy five millimeters caliber upwards... They had done their job very meticulously, conscious about the fact that they, the new "contractors", they were taking in custody this new estate for the Big Masters.

When summing the totals and comparing the reality they found on the field to the figures they had been previously communicated – both from the government and also by the espionage agencies – there was something that didn't equated.

After about an hour later, he, the Young Officer, he was summoned by the officer on duty to present himself to the Commander. It seemed that there occurred a serious problem: an armored carrier destined to NBRC research it hadn't been found...

"Why did you hide that carrier?" was he asked by the Commander. That one, too preoccupied to be pleasant to the

New Masters considered him, the Young Officer and colleague, as an enemy. Not to mention here the benefit of the doubt...

In that room were almost a dozen of foreign officers, and even more national officers, staring at him as a grand jury at a convict. Of course there were foreign officers who had the task of assessing the professional relationships, the mode to communicate, in order to to contour the psychological and sociological profiles...

"Colonel, sir, that carrier is in that shed were it usually is. Even that colonel there – and he pointed towards the German officer – he verified the shed. I didn't see what he ticked on his list in order to prevent him committing mistakes..."

This mild insolence caused some smiles to some of the foreign officers, including the German one. But the conversation took place in the maternal language...

He wasn't too impressed by the fact he was questioned in the presence of those strangers... His attitude was according to the regulations, but in the same time a dignified one. After he answered, he was looked at thoroughly, like he would have been submitted to an exam – and also with some contempt – by the German officer he indicated as responsible for that mistake.

But he had the vague impression that that wasn't at all a mistake, and it rather was a testing of the way the commanders and the subordinates react in a conflict situation, and also a way to instill guilt – that guilt that had to be instilled within the whole society in order to be easier to control it...

He, the Young Officer, and that German Officer went to identify that NBRC carrier. With them asked to go also the American Officer. They left for that shed without being noticed by the official translator – of course a counter espionage officer...

Arrived there they saw that carrier and, with a red face, almost barely speaking, the German Officer apologized in English.

"There is no problem sir. I consider it a simple misunderstanding, long gone by now." – answered him, the Young Officer.

“Can you show us what devices this NBRC carrier has on it? I’m just curious...” – asked the American Officer.

“Sure I can sir, but let me first ask my superiors for permission.”

“Of course! Please do!”

He, the Young Officer, he didn’t need to go and ask the Commander, because both the Commander and the Official Translator appeared in running, terrified by what secrets he could have been unveiled...

The permission sounded rather as an order.

“Hurry up! We are already late for lunch!”

Less the German but more the American, they both were praising that NBRC carrier. That machine was a little factory, having on it, at that time, the most advanced combat technology for determining the nuclear, biological, radiological and chemical contamination. On the contaminated area, that machine allowed the militaries to take samples, to analyze them, to communicate the results back to headquarter, to mark the contaminated area – and all of these by providing the personnel with safety by filtering the air and ensuring a positive pressurization of the cabin.

At the end, he, the Young Officer, he wanted to remain there, but the American Officer asked the Commander to allow him to speak privately to him. The official translator told him: “Take care not to say something stupid!...”

Waiting for the official reports to be taped on typewriter – at that time there was only one computer, having a specially appointed officer to work with, being in the same time highly classified and locked behind bars in a room where nobody had access but only that officer... a computer using sixteen inch disks, first one for loading up the soft, and the other for recording the result of the work... - the two officers, the Young Officer and the American Officer had a private dialogue...

It must be mentioned here that at that time, the communist law forbidding the “relations” with the foreigners, it still was in place. That law ruled that nobody – even the civilians – can have any relations with the strangers and, in case an accidental conversation took place, they have to fill in a detailed report describing the situation and writing down as closely as possible the words used during that conversation –

actually they counterespionage organs wanted a transcript of that conversation...

On that hall, the two officers discussed all the banalities in the world: about daily life, about passions, about sports, about anything – except the Army. That American Officer was very talkative. He tried very much to inspire confidence. He, the Young Officer, he had the sensation that he was being submitted to a psychological and personality test.

Finally, the Commission finalized the report and everybody signed it.

The American Officer asked the Young Officer a last question, asking him if he ever considered the possibility of participating to an UNO peacekeeping mission. He answered that he would be interested, even though he had no idea what such a mission was.

“Maybe we’ll see each other again! You know, my grandparents came in the United States in nineteen forty three, escaping from Bucovina before the Soviet invasion...”

Motto: “Vindicta forti maxima est ignoscere.”³¹

Ark 5 – Paterikon

He wondered so much of how “plainly” the Fathers of the Wilderness were talking about God! “How comes?!... Must we take the religion’s words literally?!... I have been always thinking that there is only a figurative meaning they try to convey... that, trying to express the inexpressible, they speak poetically, metaphorically... But those hermits live God as they breathe, as they drink their water and they eat their little piece dry of bread.

Most amusing was that story about a hermit who, when turning back to his cell, he found it plundered by some thieves who took his few things, almost perished because of long use, which he had there in order to survive. But, those thieves, in their hurry and in order to avoid being caught, they missed a pot which was a little aside. That Father, in his unlimited kindness and detachment from the worldly thing, he took that pot and started running after the thieves in order to give them even that last pot. But the thieves, when they saw him running after them, they started running even quicker, because they taught that Father was trying to catch them. Because of fatigue, those thieves stopped because they couldn’t run anymore. That Father caught them latter and begged them to take that pot too, because he didn’t need it after all. Very surprised by his behavior, and by seeing what a great faith and holiness that Father had, those thieves returned everything they stole and asked him for forgiveness.

“If I had done that, the thieves would have laughed at me and maybe they would have hit me in the mouth, in order to teach me a lesson!...”

He was so charmed by what he was reading, but he didn’t think that it was possible to apply those in the daily real life.

³¹ Lat.: “The biggest revenge of the powerful one, it is to forgive.”

“They had nothing to lose! But I have a family to provide for!” – was him justifying himself.

While reading, he felt how a love, interwoven with admiration for the Ascetic Fathers from Paterikon it was gradually engulfing him. He felt himself indebted and he was thanking in his thought to the Priest who translated the original Greek Text and published that book. But that Priest didn't mention his name anywhere on that book. If it wasn't to the Bishop who wrote the Foreword, entitled “At the Beginning of a Good Deed”, nobody would have known the name of that Priest.

“Behold what a wonderful book! And what miraculous it was the way this Priest succeeded to offer it us! It is not easy, by all means, to translate for being published, four hundred and thirty nine pages, and to preserve that perfume, the expressivity, the clarity, and the capacity of inspiring, the original texts had!”- He thought.

While reading the words of the Fathers, he was oscillating between totally accepting those words, without any reserve - an acceptance which was making him emotional and sometimes filled his eyes with tears - and rejecting those words which, because even though it was possible to be applied there, in the Wilderness, it was also impossible to him to apply them to the world he was living in.

He was accustomed to be appreciated for the exemplary manner he always was fulfilling his duties in. He had never deviated from regulations' provisions, he had never done disciplinary violations ever and of any kind. He had been always respectful and disciplined.

But that time a serious injustice had been done to him. That critique, with disqualifying, and offending words, which he received from the Battalion's Commander, in the beginning it bewildered him, and then it filled him up with hatred. The Commander even told him that he followed to announce him his punishment in a few days term. He had only executed thoroughly what he was ordered to, and he even had volunteered and had helped others to fulfill their parts, because that was a very difficult task and very few were familiar with it. And then, what was that all about?!...

He carried the Paterikon with him, for those three hours of daily commuting offered him the possibility to read a lot. Arrived to his office he felt that need of opening that book and test what he would feel, in the given situation, about the Fathers' words. He opened that book randomly and read:

"What do you hate the one who had upset you for? It is not him who did you wrong, but the devil. Do hate the sickness, and not the sick one!"

A strange appeasement engulfed him. By recalling the unpleasant moments he lived in, he saw again the Commander's face, transfigured with anger. He understood now that that man discharged his own load on him. That period of endless inspections, with the personnel's increasing discontent the Commander had no means to solve, all these things put such a pressure on that man than he was no longer able to contain himself. He, the Young Officer, he was only the lightning discharger.

An odd thought was taking shape in his mind: "What if, I would turn the other cheek?!..."

So he asked to be received by the Commander.

"Commander, sir, I have committed a serious mistake. So, please punish me exemplarily!"

Battalion's Commander dropped his jaw... he thought, at the beginning, that the Young Officer was mocking him. So that he started staring at him attentively.

After an embarrassing silence that took a few seconds, something surprising happened there. That tough man, sometimes violent in his behavior and in his decisions, almost all the time drunk, and despising with his subordinates, that man felt suddenly embarrassed. He had a red face, mumbled something about that it wasn't the case to further discuss that event, and that he might have been too nervous... and then he asked the young Officer to leave.

He, the young officer, he couldn't believe it! So, that it was functioning!... In the real life!... Literally!...

And he suddenly saw that the truly pitiful man it was the Commander; he saw how that man was a hesitating and unsure of himself guy, who was trying to hide his weaknesses by putting on a pretended harshness.

So that he, the Young Officer, he forgave³² the Commander, and he very soon also forgot about all of that.

³² Father Nicolae dela Rohia tells that there are three stages of the forgiveness: to forgive the one who did wrong to you, to forgive yourself for you have done wrong to that man, and to forgive the one whom you have done wrong.

Motto: “Iuris praecepta sunt haec: honeste vivere, alterum non laedere, suum cuique tribuere.”³³

Awakening 4 – While We Were Defending Our Country...

That sector of the defense wall assigned to the company was quite sizable in length. On that wall, for it was twelve meters broad, and covered with almost two meters deep layer of ground, they were ordered to dig up foxholes, where the militaries were executing their watches, and they ate, and they slept there... It seemed the Regiment's Commander had forgotten them there...

That guard, destined to “repel a possible attack on the unit”, it lasted almost for three weeks. No attack took place, because there was nobody to attack them... On the other hand, the stronghold's walls had so many places one could use to enter it unnoticed, so that from this point of view too, that guarding on the walls was futile.

“Do you foresee this guarding taking any longer, Commander?”

“We must defend our Country! This guarding mission will last until new orders will be issued!”

While the subunits of the Regiment were living in those harsh conditions on the Stronghold's walls, the military music platoon asked for vacation. On one way they were right: they didn't have who to sing for... In the same time might be not so ironically to say that the patriotic songs they knew had become obsolete – in that era that just had passed, “patriotic” meant to adulate Ceausescu and Communist Party...

They got what they wanted and they started smuggling all sorts of stuff in the neighboring countries. The Regiment's storages' chiefs forged documents and cut down the quantities of sellable materials they had: nails, pliers, scissors, barbed

³³ Lat.: “The principles of the law are these: live honestly, do not harm somebody else, and give everyone what he deserves.”

wire, axes, crowbars, shovels, wrenches, vehicle parts... you name it!

And the musicians filled their cars up with those materials and went and sold them almost for nothing... - even though they brought back foreign currencies...

"I've made four thousands German marks a month!..." boasted one of the musicians, to him, the Young Officer.

"Good for you, my friend! You have done that while we were defending our Country!"

"You've been amongst suckers!... When I went to give the bribe - a whole box with Albanian cognac, because I needed them to extend my medical leave with another week - I was waiting like a beggar in the antechamber, waiting to be received by the doctor. In the medical office there was the Commander and, because of negligence or because they simply didn't care, they left the door open. They, the Commander and the doctor were mocking you:

"Let them stay on the walls, in order to forget about democracy and freedom. What's this stupidity?!... What's this ACDA³⁴?! Are they trying to overthrow us in order to take our positions?! And how can there be democracy in the Army?!..."

He, the Young Officer, he felt himself deeply offended. Not because of the one he was talking to, but because of those words which were shaming him so much! So, there was one more Commanders considering him - and his colleagues - as suckers!.. Was that inconsideration a "genetic disease" amongst the Army's Commanders?!...

Where were then those generous ideals, he and his colleagues officers had been told about? Were those only empty phrases?! Could that be possible that the perverted life can dwell even amongst the ones who swore to live their lives under the honor's coat of arms?!...

And if so, he, the Idealist Lieutenant, what had him to do?!.. His Country was constantly refusing him the honor to respect his Country! His own people were constantly disregarding his adulation feelings, because it was too occupied with contraband... They shouted out: "The Army is with Us!", only because somebody instilled them to do it and offered them

³⁴ Action Committee for Democratizing the Army.

that mantra in order to prevent a carnage, or because they were afraid and tried to flatter the Army to take their side... probably the Army followed to become again – as it always had been – a burden to this disoriented people!...

Had him be running after the quick enrichment, selling beddings and nails in the neighboring countries?! – swallowing the humiliation the custom officials were submitting all the people crossing the borders? By enduring the humiliation the mafia from the marketplaces submitted the vendors and was making them pay protection fees?!... And therefore paying humiliation in exchange of money?!...

But, if he humiliated himself, it wouldn't be the whole Army humiliated?!... - in the body of which he grafted his childhood and his adolescence for the right to be accepted his supreme sacrifice for his Mother Land, when fighting his people's enemies...

There was a precipice deepening around him and - in the same time - in his soul. He wanted so much to forget about all of these!...

If only he could!

Motto: “Mirari non rimari sapientia vera est.”³⁵

Sign 3 – Place Something under that Car

Again the brakes - of that almost over thirty year old car – started not to be functional. He, the Young Officer, he bought that car from a colleague, who sold it for exactly that sum of money necessary to buy fire wood for the winter that was coming.

Someone of the many previous owners of the car had the bad idea of cleaning with sandpaper the brake cylinders and, as result, that thin layer of cement that was protecting the cast iron against rust, it has been damaged, and now the rusting process caused a rough surface that was damaging the rubber gaskets.

Because new cylinders were enormously expensive - almost as the value of the car was – he couldn’t afford to buy them and, therefore, once every few months he was striving to change those gaskets in order to stop the leakage.

That morning, a friend who was living in the same apartments block, saw him repairing again his car and, thinking that he wasn’t knowing what he was doing, that friend came and offered his help.

So, that person elevated the car on the jack, dismounted the wheel and wanted to get under the car in order to start repairing it.

All that morning he, the Young Officer, he had that bad feeling that something awful was going to happen. It was a diffuse presentiment, a state of unrest... Usually, when he was in such a state, everything he worked it failed: either he broke the screw in the cylinder, or he broke a pipe... either he got hurt...

His friend’s insistence to help him, it offended him a little... He understood that that one considered him as unskilled and that was bothering his pride...

³⁵ Lat.: “Admiring, not rummaging, this is the true wisdom.”

“Place something under the car!... It might fall off the jack!” he recommended to his friend.

But that one, too eager to prove his mastery, he already got under the car, having his legs under the chassis and his head under the left front fender.

He, The Young Officer, he took the dismantled wheel and the reserve wheel, and he placed them under the chassis, despite his friend’s opposition.

Because of the sand from under the jack’s basis and because of the shaking of the car, the car one fell off the jack and landed on those two wheels he placed under the chassis.

Scared – “All I needed it was him dying when repairing my car!...”- he hurried to check his friend’s state. Hit on the back of his neck, but, fortunately, only a slightly for those wheels stopped the falling after only a few centimeters, that friend of him was trying to recover from his fright.

“If, at least, there would have been a Ferrari hitting you! But so, to be killed by this rust bucket...”

They ceased working. He, the Young Officer, he remained to gather the tools and, while doing that, he thought:

“So, it is true that one must listen to his gut feelings, to his fear!... The presentiments are as real as one can get! I was feeling that substance of the premonition in the whole my being, in the stomach, on the spine!...

But can there be even more?!... Can you feel not only that something is going to happen, but even what, when, and where it that going to happen?...”

Motto: “Saepe maximum pretium est pro quo nullum datur.”³⁶

Octagon 2 – Enkidu

He nicknamed that friend of his Enkidu, after he read “The Great Legends of the World”, following to the words of Gilgamesh: “He was my Friend Enkidu, the one I was hunting lions together with”...

They were colleagues in the Officers Military School and since there they were close friends. They admired each other but, in some measure, they also competed against one another. Each of them tried to resist more than the other one, when they were being tortured with those long marches of forty, of sixty, and even of a hundred kilometers in length. Each one wanted to offer his friend his help for carrying that one’s backpack or weapons...

That winter they had been brought, as usual, to that military camp for practicing skiing. On that occasion the snow was almost a meter deep.

After military training hours, they were allowed – they were in the third and last year of military school – to take long walks on the skis, around that camp, through the wood.

That afternoon, they took the skis and started go up that forest road crossing the camp and ascending towards that rocky mountain having no tree and bushes. The more they ascended the snow was becoming increasingly sparse. The permanent winds from the peak area were blowing the snow in snow heaps which were filling up the valleys from bellow, leaving behind small patches with withered grass and the tormented stalks of cranberries, as also the barren stone. For that was the stone’s and frost’s kingdom.

It was their goal to go all the way up to that ridge, a thing that was totally achievable, because that mountain had a round peak, almost like a stone hill.

³⁶ Lat.: “That thing one pays nothing for, it can sometimes cost you the most.”

After crossing that peak, on the other side of the mountain, they saw the sheepfolds, deserted during winter. Above the snow there were only the tops of the wooden fences and of the small wooden shacks.

“What if we go down there and study those shacks a little?” – proposed Enkidu. He didn’t finish saying those words and, being given the permanent competition between them, they already launched themselves in a zigzagged descent on that squeaky frozen snow.

After a few minutes they were braking next to one sheepfold.

“Let’s see what would be us living like, if we were shepherds!”

They started digging with their small infantry shovel which, together with the bayonet, they were obliged to always carry on their waist belt.

In no time, they were inside that shack. That bunk bed smelled of sheep, but that was understandable. How could a sheepfold smell if not of sheep?! But they were pleasantly surprised for that inside was so neat and for all the things were at their places.

They even found a primus with a full tank. So, they took snow and melted it down in one pot and, while the water was boiling, they threw in that pot some cranberries leaves they found in that bunch hanging on the ceiling, in the middle of the shack. That good fragrance enchanted them. As usual, they weren’t speaking to each other because they were like one – they understood each other by looks, by gestures...

They drunk all that tea in silence, and then they put all the things back to their places and prepared themselves to leave. Checking the time, they ascertained that it might be too late, because when walking on the mountain, even though the distances seem to be short, they actually are very long and difficult to cover. They thought their staying wasn’t longer that a half an hour but, again, in that charmed place the time had a different flowing. It was like they stayed in a time loop, in a time hole, at the gates of the eternity, and then they were back again in the world’s hastily passing time.

They rapidly hiked that mountain slope and, when reaching the peak, they stopped a little with the intention of resting for a little while.

A lugubrious howling tore the frozen air. Even the wind seemed to hide somewhere, because of fearing that sinister howling.

They instantly felt their hair rising up on the back of their necks, and they launched themselves in an insane descent, a quite risky one. If they fall, they will be sure victims...

In their haste, but also because of the darkness, they slipped too much towards the left side and missed the road leading them to the camp. They had to choose now what to do: to turn back to that forest road entrance, or to go right across the forest, amongst the fir trees, at a ninety degrees angle, in order to come across that road.

Both variants were risky. If they started to go up, those wolves they saw in less than a kilometer distance, they surely would catch them. And, if they tried skiing amongst trees, they would risk injuries and even death, in case they hit a sharp branch which could pierce their chest like a spear...

A few moments of panic followed...

"Let's stick together. We are going to use the skiing sticks, the little shovels, and even the bayonets if needed! They are only five wolves!..."

"I agree that. We stay together but, in the same time, let's continue moving downwards. These five wolves are only the "scout patrol" of the pack... if these five catch us latter, they will summon the whole pack to hunt us."

"Take it slightly to the right. Under that fir tree hit by lightning, there is a path leading you directly to the forester's house. From there you will find the road to the camp."

Next to them appeared, as from nowhere – or maybe he was there, but they didn't or couldn't see him!... -, that man covered in a big cloak made of sheep skins sewed together, like the shepherds wear. His hat was made out of the same material, and two eyes lightened by an internal light were looking at the two students. He was keeping his hands clasped, like in a prayer.

He saw the silent question the two students had about what he was going to do regarding those coming wolves. So that he answered them:

“Wait no longer, for the wolves not to catch you latter! They cannot harm me, because I have already defeated them!...”

Then he kneeled down and started looking at the sky, praying.

They found the things exactly like that man told them. The wolves kept howling on their tracks for a while, but then wolves stopped the pursuit because the students reached at the forester cabin, and that one's dogs started barking like mad, and the forester came out with his shotgun in order to see what was going on.

Neither than, when they were punished to be on duty to the kitchen, for a whole week, nor later, no one of them two mentioned anything on what happened. It was like they were afraid to think at whom was the one saving them.

He, the Student, looking meaningfully at his friend, he said only this:

“If I am Gilgamesh, you are my friend Enkidu I have hunted lions together with!”

Motto: “Nemo liber est qui corpori servit.”³⁷

Deluge 1 – Drunkenness

“Come on, drink! Don’t be picky, because so it starts the fists fight!”

“But I don’t want anymore!”

“Get out of here! Do you want something else to drink?!... What do you want?!...”

“I want nothing!”

“We don’t have “nothing”!”

He had already swallowed too many glasses of brandy. His cheeks started numbing. The alcohol didn’t provide him any pleasant effect; it only made him agitated and speaking loudly.

He, the Young Man, he didn’t know what he kept visiting this friend of him for. He always ceded to that one’s insinuations because, no matter how much he refused, he was forced to swallow those weaker or stronger – but always of poor quality – liquors, that one was almost forcing him to pour down his throat.

It seemed that that friend he had, he enjoyed seeing how they got drunk together. Because him too was getting very drunk and then started strife for no matter what and with no matter whom.

After exhausting all the gossips they knew, they passed to subjects on universe and on philosophy and on knowledge. The alcohol sharpened their opinions and transferred them in some sort of hyperconscious agitated state.

But they were coming again upon the same themes they were discussing on the same level each time, but expressing different point of view, because when one of them affirmed something, the other one immediately contradicted them. This way of dialoguing was of course due also to the quantity of alcohol they had ingurgitated.

³⁷ Lat.: “Nobody is free as long as he serves his body.”

The more intoxicated they were, the more the discussion became more contradictory and more intense. The by passers sometimes stopped and looked at that upper balcony, where they were arguing, trying to see what it was about. But, to themselves it seemed that they were swimming in the wisdom's waters sharing secret knowledge.

Finally, he, the Young Man, he reached home and crushed on his bed with his clothes on.

He was breathing with difficulty, while trying to sleep, and he was seeing with dread that he was getting increasingly sick. He knew that nobody could help him. The nausea and the dizziness seemed to go beyond supportability limit and he thought he was dying.

But, despite the crazy drinking he never fainted because of it. The luckiest of the alcoholics benefit of this common sense their brain has to interrupt all the connections and of bringing them in a state of slight coma. Of course their luck ends when they choke with their own vomit and die...

In similar situations, he was fighting against losing his consciousness. He was so afraid of losing control! ... And of dying!...

At one point he couldn't take it anymore and entered the bathroom, introduced his finger on his throat and touched his epiglottis. He started vomiting convulsively, spreading the toiled vessel and the area around it. He felt his stomach detaching from its place and that caused him an awful pain.

After a few minutes of relief, that sensation of being sick started again intensifying, so that he repeated again and again that maneuver in order to get rid of it.

After vomiting for many times, he started fearing that stomach pain caused by vomiting. In the same time, he expelled the whole his stomach's content, so that he had nothing left to throw up. Then he came with that idea of swallowing two glasses of mildly warm water, a thing difficult to perform because of causing instant nausea. Before finishing the second glass of water he threw up all over the sink and around it...

Late in the night, when the morning was about to come, after he vomited even the content of his gall, a brownish and sour-bitter liquid – which burnt his throat and his nostrils

when forcedly expelled – he started feeling a little better to his stomach.

But then he started sweating cold, abundant, and stinky. That pain gradually engulfed his whole head and the many pills he took didn't have but a slight and late effect.

He felt so ashamed because of being seen in that state by his family! He betrayed them, he sold them in exchange for alcohol, he disappointed them, he scared them, he placed them on the second place as importance, he did...

“I wonder what I am doing this for?!... Because I don't even like alcohol! It doesn't even make me feel good!... Could there be about a curse?!...”

Motto: “Sacra doctrina cum cunctis homnibus communiter proponatur, in ea metaphoris et corporabilus similitudinis divina exponi maxime conveniens est.”³⁸

Paradise 8 – Flight

Above that valley were skyrocketing the peaks of those huge hills, on the top of which there were struggling to survive only a few dwarfed bushes, barely resisting those strong winds and dread frosts.

All around was growing that tall and thin grass, having sharp long blades which, when touched by mistake, they stuck to the clothes with their small thorns and, in the same time, cut deeply the exposed skin causing an abundant bleeding.

The only safe passages crossing through that enemy green-whitish sea, there were the tracks trodden by sheep, elegantly meandering from bottom to top, and crossing above that kaolin quarry, which was open like a giant mouth in the middle of that huge hill.

Excavators were biting the ground with their shovels and then were throwing it upon the edge of the road they cut. Bulldozers were pushing the excavated soil down over the ridge, and the soil was flowing down in torrents of comminuted and loose rivers of soil.

When the machineries weren't working, those torrent of loosen earth seemed to be some giant columns starting from the edge of the upper road and ending on the road bellow.

Here was him coming on Sundays, when the workers weren't there. The guards of the brick factory weren't even thinking to come up there, firstly because it was two hours' climb on foot. They only shouted out at him, from bellow, and, unexpectedly – because that giant cut was like a giant ancient theater of the nature, with a very good acoustic – he could hear their warnings and their advices but he didn't care at all.

³⁸ Lat.: “When the sacred teaching is taught to all people, generally, it is the most appropriate to present the divine teachings with the help of metaphors and some bodily analogies.”

What he was doing, it put him in the danger of being buried or crushed by giant landslides... because he was jumping from the top of those columns, downwards, landing four or five meters below, and kept doing that until he reached the bottom of the column. It took ten jumps to accomplish all that descent.

Before jumping, he was hesitating a little, like a young vulture learning how to fly and he was foreseeing, in the same time, that overwhelming freedom of the flight. Then he jumped with his hands opened like wings and with his knees kept close to his chest, like he was a bird hatching directly in flight. Looking at the world beneath him, during that a few seconds long flight, he felt like he was floating above the world from below.

That soft soil was cushioning his landing, embracing him, cold and airy.

He was repeating those flights, endlessly, eagerly, like in a holy drunkenness. He went up, again and again, and then floated through the sky, wanting more and more of that.

He only stopped doing that at dusk. All his pockets and also the clothes and his shoes were filled up with dust and he also had dust on his hair, on his face and in his mouth and nose... he was hungry and exhausted, crawling on that path back home...

He took it on that sheep path down the hill and he saw in that great valley the localities stretching to the horizon. Amongst those lilliputian houses, midget people were moving back and forth like some ants... Gradually, the sun was only illuminating the top of the hill, and the world from below sunk in darkness.

It seemed he was descending from the heavenly lighten life, in the dark of the world's tomb.

Motto: “Sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes?”³⁹

Banishing 7 – Eritrea

A few months passed and he was ordered to go and sit an English language exam in the Capital City. That notice come unexpectedly – he never asked for it - but he realized he had to thank that American who was in that NATO commission he was talking so familiarly to, on the Battalion’s hall.

The result of the psychological examining was ok and then it followed the testing of his English language skills. He had no illusions about what his chances were, because he already heard about the sums paid as bribe, about the lobby one needed in order to be accepted and sent in international peacekeeping missions...

If his leaving for testing it was unnoticed, his turning back was almost a scandal... Everybody knew he has connections in high places, in the Capital City, and that: “this smart guy, with his English language, he is well arranged now!”

The only person not knowing anything was him! He answered them nothing because he knew that the more he denied it the more they thought the contrary.

His colleagues’ attitudes changed according to their character. The Commander seemed to adopt a more condescend position concerning him, while some of his colleague he thought they were friends, they started to avoid him and to envy him...

Another couple of months passed and both, him and his colleagues, they started to forget about the whole thing. He even gave up hope... but, actually, what was that he hoped? He knew nothing about what a “peacekeeping mission” was!

Human Resources Officer came to him having that attitude like he was telling him a big secret:

“You have to urgently go back to the Capital City, to the Ministry of Defense!”

³⁹ Lat.: “But the guardians themselves, whom will they be guarded by?”

"Yes, sir, of course I will! But can you tell me what's happening?"

"You've been selected to be sent in mission abroad. We do not know details. They are going to tell you there, at Ministry. You have here all the necessary papers. You've been actually detached to a special unit, during that mission. Take with you the service uniform. To Bucharest you can go in civilian clothes."

After a short pause that officer added:

"How lucky you are, or what important people you do know! Other sold their cars to give bribe and didn't succeed to go..."

The two weeks of preparing for the mission weren't so difficult. Those who were appointed to prepare them seemed they always had something else to urgently do. Except the foreign counselors, the other were rather absent from classes. It maybe was so because the Generals considered them a too small auditory to speak to, for the small group of only ten officers didn't deserve their precious time...

But during that short preparation time he learnt from one of his colleagues how to use a computer for taping texts and for sending emails, things which proved to be indispensable in performing that mission.

They were given Diplomatic Passports, the plane tickets, the cash in dollars, and there was also a small ceremony through which the Country said them good bye.

To some of them there were present also their families in order to spend together the few hours remained until departure. Nobody came to see him; his wife and him, they couldn't afford such expenses. And even if they did, he considered that such a trip with their little girl wouldn't have any point.

At the Military Hotel a slight panic attack engulfed him. The next day he was to leave for Eritrea, a flight via Rome... He had never leaved his country before, he had never flown!...

It was so unreal the events he was living!... How could that be, that him, a son of a peasants family from a village forgotten by the time and absent of the world's maps, to reach that Continent, Africa, of which mysteries and stories nourished his childhood's dreams?!...

He kept twisting in that quite uncomfortable bed, trying not to think at the situation anymore, but his soul kept being invaded alternatively by panic and by joy; finally he fell asleep - but not for long. The two alarm clocks – it was a precaution measure to have two, in case one would have been broken - started ringing I the same time and he jumped off the bed. He hastily put his clothes on and he verified his traveling documents, his money for the trip, his plane ticket, he looked around for the last time at that room that was his home for all those weeks and, without knowing why, he felt the need to pray to God... He knew no prayer and he felt bad and somehow guilty for that... But even that thought made him feel more comfortable and less lonely! He uttered in his mind only that: “God, help me!” and left for that taxi which was waiting for him, in order to take him to the airport, where he reached too early...

In the Airport he tried to hide his lack of experience. He was walking slowly, pretending to not pay too much attention to the things from around him, but he was thoroughly and intensively fighting his nescience in order to decipher all the signs telling him about the mechanisms of what was happening there.

Finally he saw that list with the departures. He identified with real difficulty the plane he was to board on. When there was an hour left to his “check in”, he was attentively listening to any announce of the speakers. Finally, a metallic voice invited the passengers for Rome, to get in line to that counter where the luggage was to be collected and then to present to the gate where the checking in for that flight had started.

In Rome, he ran hastily through that Airport, because the arrival flight was late. He never knew how, suddenly, he was flying over the Mediterranean Sea. In that sunny day and from that height in the air, the sea water had that color you can see it in the advertisements for swimming pools; the whitish-blue from close to the shore it gradually changes in a grey one. There was a splendid weather! That autumn day scattered on the blue sky some white, shredded clouds, carries away by the airs currents.

Flying above Africa, he saw those combinations of colors with nuances he had never seen before – colors and nuances unlike the ones from Europe, where the predominant ones are green and grey. There was more brown-reddish, more yellow-brownish, and the green – where there was vegetation – it preponderantly had dark nuances.

He imagined the endless open plains of Africa will be crowded with wild animals... The he was to be a glorious explorer coming to pacify the warmonger tribes which are fighting for the domination upon some meaningless dunes of sands...

In Asmara, the Eritrean Capital City, there was an Indian military waiting for him, at the Airport. That one was speaking English with an odd accent, but a perfectly intelligible one.

That white terrain car from the Airport's parking lot, it had on the doors those two letters, symbolizing the Institution that was to be, to the militaries arriving from all the corners of the world: home, father, family, employer...: UN⁴⁰.

He wondered why, after they boarded that car, the Indian military blocked the doors from inside – but he thought that that one pushed the locking button by mistake... he also noticed that, when traveling the agglomerated streets of that country, the driver never went under eighty kilometers per hour – a fact that caused him, the passenger, some big worries...

He, the Young Captain, he was later told that locking the door up and driving with eighty kilometers per hour speed, they were two safety measures against being kidnapped and in order to dissuade the people throwing in front of the passing cars in order to be slightly wounded and to file up complains for being paid huge reparations.

That Indian seemed not to notice the emotions of the newcomer. He had maybe got bored by too many greenhorns he welcomed over years.

Asmara is settled in a depression, surrounded by high, barren hills, casting their brown shadow on the background made of whitish mist arising at the Horizon; but that white

⁴⁰ Abbreviation for: United Nations.

mist had no power to become clouds, probably due to the too high temperature of the air. There was a suffocating heat...

“Do not take those Malaria pills, because they are going to destroy your liver! That’s certitude! Of course you can catch malaria, but that’s only a possibility!...” was him, the Young Captain, told, instead of welcome, by the Team’s Commander. That Team was located somewhere at the outskirts of a Village, situated somewhere in a location lost between mountain, hills, and savanna, a few kilometers from the border with Ethiopia, and some tens of kilometers from Akdy Keith⁴¹.

That quite joyful Dutch Military helped him accommodate in that wooden barrack that was intended to be their home, while him, the Young Captain, was trying to endure the jetlag he was suffering so badly of, and also to forget the emotions caused him by that helicopter flight, that Russian pilot had flew it, as they would have been in Vietnam, trying to escape American jetfighters attack...

“Do you know, we are sleeping here at five thousands stars hotel...” the Dutch Military told him.

He didn’t answer him, because he didn’t know how to process that affirmation; but he followed to find out quite soon what was all of that about! That night – as all the nights there – the heat became unbearable... so that then all the team members got out and hanged their hammocks on the trees from around. Above them, on the Africa’s sky, there were shining the stars he was told about – “of course, there is an infinite numbers of stars, but the record of counting them stopped at five thousands...” joked that one again.

Their mission was to see, to hear, to check, and to establish contacts with the Locals. All of those in order to prevent a new war. The previous war lasted for two years, and then had short recurrences, but finally ended when UNMEE⁴² deployed there over four thousands UN militaries. It was thought than more than seven millions Civilians suffered consequently to that war.

“And how are you? And your family? And your relatives? And the livestock you are breeding how are they?...” So it

⁴¹ Akdy Keith is a city in Eritrea.

⁴² Abbreviation for: United Nation Mission for Ethiopia and Eritrea.

started each discussion with the Locals. The Ritual imposed almost twenty minutes of purely phatic dialogue. Of course, a European could consider such questions as violating his privacy and as rude and uncivilized if coming from a total stranger, but those were absolutely mandatory when starting a dialogue with a Local Eritrean. What in Europe was considered as inappropriate, in Eritrea was a sign of great respect and consideration...

"They are so alike! What had they been fighting for?!... These boulders and this sand, could they justify the death and the sufferance of so many millions of innocent people?! The pride of the leading class is immeasurable! They don't care that they are reigning upon people starving in poverty. They aren't ashamed by the naked children having those swollen bellies, because of inadequate feeding!... They amass billion in wealth - leeches sucking the life out of these poor people..."

The life in the Team it started finding its rhythms. As also did his stomach. He was able now to eat cactus flowers, or fried locusts, for instance... Days passed and he was growing increasingly integrated. He was getting Africanized... namely he no longer saw that green as being so green, neither that sand as being so yellow, nor that blue sky being so blue... The time fades any novelty and accustoms us to almost everything, good or bad...

"Tomorrow you are going to benefit of a day off... You can take a car and visit the surroundings..."

"How far I am allowed to go?"

"As far as you still are able to be back here, by evening. If that is not the case, we have this standard operational procedure and we will send a helicopter to search for you. If it proves that's your fault, you will pay from your salary the aviation petrol... in addition to that there will be the pilots' curses addressed to you..."

He took with him around two hundred Nafka⁴³, that terrain vehicle he was constantly using in his missions, and he left for the mountains from the Horizon, keeping the engine of that car throttled because he rarely succeeded to change from the second gear, due to the steep slopes that road had.

⁴³ That is the Eritrean currency. 1 Nafka = 100 Cents.

Almost all the roads were made of clay, probably cut with the bulldozer and rarely flattened or repaired after. Rains, as also the vehicles wheels, they dug trenches and holes which could be quite dangerous for the inattentive drivers.

The safety training they were provided with, it specified that especially in the higher portions of the roads, there numerous accidents take place, both because of the inattentive drivers and because of the poor roads' quality. And it really was like that! While he was climbing, he could see in the precipices from both sides of the road, wrecked busses, trucks, and cars.

"I wonder if there was somebody to go down there and who tried to help those victims..."

The life of the individual person had no value in those places. This egotism could have been justified by the harsh struggle for surviving. But, in the same time, that egotism is a cause of the situation the people are living there in.

"Sir, he addressed that Local Policeman – of course, after the usual polite phrases and questions... - who was wasting his time in the shadow of that terrace covered with reed, sipping his tea, about a kilometer behind, there is a dead woman, just on the side of the road. It seems she was hit by a car..."

"We'll go and check, after we will have finished our tea break... answered that one, visibly bothered. But only because You ask us to do that..."

The only emotion that Policeman had, it was annoyance! If a person didn't belong to your Family, or at least to your Tribe, it was totally unimportant to you. To some Planet's populations, the gathering in a Country it seems to be too early to be done, because they are in a too early historical stage to be able to comply with that. As also, to other peoples of the Planet, the Nations have become a brake, a hindrance, and an incessant cause for wars and destruction... Not to mention that the Nations usually are preaching their religions as being "universal" while they are still praising their religion's "nationality"!

"You have to take remove and burry the mummified cadavers from the Desert, because they belong to your soldiers dead in the War!" it was the condition imposed by UNMEE in exchange for the provided help.

“But we do not know if those are our soldiers! Maybe they are enemies and we do not want to toil for them!” answered the Locals, both from Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Finally, it had been established as a distinctive sign the fact of wearing boots or of being barefooted; the ones who had boots on they were considered as belonging to the wealthier Country and they were buried by that Country. The barefooted were buried by the other Country.

“But they are so much alike! What were they fighting for?!...” he asked himself again.

The first six months period flew unnoticed. He was proposed the contract renewal. He was offered time for making a decision. And he made that decision... in five seconds!

“Yes! Of course I agree that!”

“You know, you are going to leave Asmara for the General Headquarters. You are going to work on intelligence...”

It took only a little long to integrate himself in the new collective. There were also militaries belonging to diverse nations.

“You are from Pakistan, and you are from India. How do you manage to get along with each other?”

“Here we are comrades and, I might say, we are friends. We have, anyway, a common mission. If we meet each other in Kashmir, we are going to be enemies and we won’t spare each other.”

His work was appreciated. He achieved a particular way of sensing what data must be summarized and what data must be presented in details. He was doing his job very thoroughly and his pleasant way of being, open to any sort of discussion, it transformed him in an informal leader. He made friendship with many. The African officers though, they were keeping their distance. Some of them, despite being poorly prepared, they were occupying management positions. Amongst them there were few with an unlimited arrogance, believing that they deserved everything. With those ones it was the most difficult to deal with. But the UN mission must observe the important role the OAU⁴⁴ had in concluding the ceasefire treaty, in asking for and also in accepting the UN mission.

⁴⁴ Abbreviation for: Organization for the African Unity.

And there was one more aspect: the Africans, due to their long exploitation by the white man, no matter how good were the intentions the UN mission had, and despite how much that UN mission helped the people from that region, the Africans still considered it as a meddling in their businesses and as a continuation of the oppression the white race was exercising upon them...

In order to exchange information, the two headquarters of the UB mission, the one from Asmara and the one from Addis Ababa, they decided to undertake, for a few days, a common activity for reciprocal informing. Even though at the beginning he wanted to avoid the participation, because he didn't like the formal meetings and the endless speeches held on these occasions, he was appointed in the delegation, so he had no other choice but to comply with the order.

The schedule of the activities specified that he had to be present to the activities from the first two days, and then he had another two days time for "sightseeing".

He searched on Internet information related to the touristic objectives deserving to be seen in Ethiopia. There were plenty of them! But his attention was caught by Lalibela, a city situated in the federal state of Amhara, at an altitude of two thousands and five hundred meters above the sea level, where there are eleven Churches carved in some huge rock plateau. The City took his name from the one who initiated and sustained the building up of these Churches, the King Gebra Maskal Lalibela⁴⁵ (1137-1270), a continuator of the Zagwe Dynasty.

He, the Young Captain arrived in Lalibela City in a period of fasting. The City, which has over a thousand priests amongst the thirty thousand inhabitants, it seemed almost deserted. As it seemed also the first Church he entered, the

⁴⁵ King Lalibela aimed to build up there a New Jerusalem. He named the constructions with the names of the main religious buildings from Jerusalem, but the new buildings do not resemble at all to those ones, being totally original. The King - after the building up of the eleven Churches was finalized - he converted himself to the Christian religion life. After twenty years of reigning, King Lalibela abdicated and lived in a cave eating only roots and vegetables. In the present, King Lalibela is considered as one of the greatest Saints of the Ethiopian Christians.

first one he encountered, after he crossed a green valley and then he climbed the top of a rocky hill.

That Church has its ceiling on the ground's level. Its shape is that of a cross, and the entrance is around fifty meters below the ground level.

Quite narrow carved stairs guide you downwards to the entrance. Descending, you deepen yourself in a world of mysteries, a closed world, a controlled world, a non-scattered world.

There was nobody around, so that he entered that Church. Without being a Christian practitioner, he felt the need to make upon himself the sign of the Cross.

The quietude was absolute there. Inside, the only company he had was a diminished light and, if he might see them, the angels. That profound silence, as a spring of peace, it fell like a waterfall within the visitor's soul. He felt himself, without being able to explain why, as he was at home. He tasted a similar quietude when, being a child, he accompanied his Grandma to the Little Church from that Hill from above the Village, in order to proceed to the cleaning up and to the refreshing the Small Cultic Dwelling. While the adults were getting the diverse objects out from the Church and were placing them on that little plateau covered in green grass, in the springtime's sun, he, the Child, he remained standing in front of those Saints painted on calves skins and he felt the need to speak to them, to share his childish thoughts to them. He perfectly remembered that bitter-sweet love he felt back then. It was like a gentle pain, a joyful sadness, which he didn't want to reject but, on the opposite, he wanted it never to end.

He had the same feeling, but more intensely. The warmth engulfing his heart made him totally surrender to a religious feeling he never experienced before. All his thoughts vanished away. Inside himself he felt how it was growing up, flooding him, a Light he knew that he always desired It, and Which he felt it being so familiar to him.

He fell down on his knees and big tears started rolling down from his eyes, which he kept open, but seeing nothing... Then, slowly, that feeling left him and he remained exhausted, amazed, happy, and in the same time afraid of the happened things.

He didn't know for how long lasted that feeling. It was probably already dark outside. He decided that it was time to go and, because there was no light inside, he advanced in that direction he thought the entrance wall was, with the intention to touch the stone with his right hand and to use that touch as a guide towards the exit. He started walking slowly and, at some distance, he saw a smooth light, and he thought that that was the exit.

From that place he was walking towards, he heard some voices singing Psalms, almost by whispering. He carefully went closer, trying to not interrupt some ritual taking place there and to not offend the people officiating it.

Suddenly, in front of him opened a huge nave, even bigger than the nave of the Church he was in before. At the opposite end there was an altar and in the middle of the nave there was a pillar covered with inscriptions and symbols, one of which particularly drawn his attention: it was an Octagon having around it, at each of the corners, eight spoked wheels.

When noticing his presence, the Priests there became agitated and rushed towards him. One of them raised his vestment's right wing, trying to hide that pillar from his sight.

It was so strange that no one of them addressed him any word; they didn't rebuke him, they didn't tell him to leave; they only seemed so surprised because of seeing him there; he, the Young Captain, he, an Intruder, he saw that pillar...

The Priest that seemed to be the hierarchal superior came out of altar and get close to him. That one looked at him with kindness, but also with a certain curiosity. Then, that one told him in a perfectly intelligible English language:

"Why have you come here?"

It took a while until him, the Young Captain, got appeased, but that Priest didn't seem to be in a hurry; on the contrary, that Priest seemed to have all the time in the world, as he would have been outside the time.

"I apologize for interrupting you! I have got lost. I am so sorry for I disturbed the ritual!"

"You hadn't been here if God wouldn't have wanted that. Therefore, you must be joyful and not sad for this... I saw you in the Saint George's Church how you fell in awe... Maybe even Saint Lalibela has prayed for you and has led you here..."

“Please accept my apology again! I only want you to show me the way out and I will immediately go away! I don’t want to bother you more!...” Him, the Young Captain, him was offered that divine mercy and gift of acceding to knowledge, but he didn’t understand and he wasn’t able to welcome it.

“Please stop accusing yourself! The first rule is not to consider ourselves guilty in front of the people but rather indebted to God.

Nobody had reached here if he wouldn’t have been led here, if he wouldn’t be predestined to see this Church. You see, we are in the Twelfth Church: the Hidden One. Nobody who knows about it speaks about it. You reached here through one of the tunnels connecting all the other Eleven Churches with this one. Once you are here, it means you had to be and you have the right of receiving from us the answer to anything you would want to know....”

“I have seen on that pillar an Octagon surrounded by spoked wheels. What does that symbolize?”

“The Octagon is the Spiritual Ark, the one resisting that Deluge the evil one raises it against the believers. But it also means the place of birth of a spring of existence situated in the middle of a natural fortress whose walls are mountains, and in the middle of which there is the Hidden Mountain⁴⁶. You are from there, and you will go back there. And there you will cross through the Second Deluge; you won’t die, but you will be reborn!”

Those words, even though they seemed to convey him simple, familiar things, they didn’t offer him their whole meaning.

They dialogued for a long time. Meanwhile, that singing of Psalms continued ceaselessly. No matter how long the pauses were, during that dialogue, they seemed to be totally natural and by no means embarrassing. Actually, they didn’t simply dialogued, but That One was sharing him, the Young Captain, everything he was asking for. No more, and no less – according to the right reckoning of the due things.

⁴⁶ Kogaion.

It was unclear for how long they discussed, tirelessly. In certain moments, to him, to the Young Captain, it seemed he was dialoguing with his own conscience.

Then, he couldn't be able to tell how, he fell asleep and dreamt that he was on his childhood's hills, in the clay quarry and jumping on that steep slopes, being filled up, during those few seconds of the flight, with an unbearable happiness.

He was awakened by that man who came to prepare the Saint George's Church for receiving visitors in that new day. He, the Young Captain, he didn't want at the beginning to lose that wonderful dream but he slowly started realizing where he was and that there was already morning.

He left, but not before turning towards the Altar and making the sign of the Cross upon himself.

"That dream was more real than the reality itself is!..."

While walking that path towards the City he saw that group of children following him from distance, like they would have wanted to protect him on his way back and to take a good bye... he stopped and looked at them more attentively. Those children were walking on stilts, which they grabbed and hold with their elbows raised horizontally. The blinding sun shining from behind of them made the thin stilts almost invisible and the unclear silhouettes seemed floating on the air... and those elbows seemed to be small wings...

Those children, bathed by the sunlight, they seemed to be some angels...

When he was about to enter the city he looked once more, back at them. Then he had this revelation: they were eight!...

Motto: “Audi prudenter et responde sapienter.”⁴⁷

Ark 6 – Father Gabriel

On that occasion when he attended that preparedness course he met a former Military School colleague, who was one study year younger. His name was Gabriel and he was in the new position, appointed as coordinating officer for the sports activity.

“How are you doing it?” that one asked him.

“I am quite stressed because I had so many things to do back home and they sent me here, to be taught things I already know... The three months period this course will take, it seems to me such a waste of time!... I could read the bibliography back home and come here only so sit the exams!... and I even could sit those exams via Internet, avoiding wasting my time and my money traveling...”

“Come on, all this will pass away... We, the lecturers, we too have to have a job, in order to make a living...”

They spoke about almost everything. He, the Young Captain, he had almost nothing special to tell about, but Gabriel already lived as for two lives. He had been submitted to a surgical removal of one of his kidneys, which was attacked by cancer, and he was saved after that surgical procedure by a retired doctor who developed a controversial and in the same time unknown to the medical community “vaccine”, and then Gabriel passed through several military units, and in two of them he supervised the building up a two Wooden Churches, and he adopted two small children, and now his wife was pregnant with a child of their own, and he obtained with spectacular results a master degree in theology, and he was then engaged and thoroughly committed to that reopening of the monastic infirmaries, and he wrote an impressive book which was both a spiritual and a practical guide destined to the people suffering of incurable illnesses as he did...

⁴⁷ Lat.: “Listen carefully and respond wisely.”

Because he didn't brought his family yet, Gabriel was living in a small room the Commander of that Military unit offered him, a room situated under the stairs from that part of the building, a room that usually nobody noticed that it was there. Gabriel invited him, the Young Captain, to sometimes come and have a cup of tea, made out of that all-saints' wort he himself picked it up and dries it up.

On that evening, after finishing "drawing up" that tactical situation on that military map, he went down the stairs and he saw that reddish light coming from under the door of that room his colleague and friend was living in. So that he knocked on the door, intending to say him "good night!", because it already was past ten p.m....

Gabriel didn't answer immediately, and he almost left... But, after a few seconds, Gabriel opened that door and invited him inside, having a luminous expression on his face.

"I've come for that tea..."

That small room seemed to be a monastic cell. The inside was perfumed with that good fragrance the all-saints' wort it was spreading it in the air. There was a small table having improvised on it a small altar, composed by two traditional Orthodox icons, one representing Christ the Savior, placed to the right, and one representing the Mother of the Lord, placed to the left. A small candle was burning there in a red jar, casting all around, that reddish but very smooth light.

"The tea is ready. It only needs to be left to cool down a little. Lo, I had been praying when you have arrived... would you mind to continue praying together until the canon of prayer I must do it every evening, it will come to an end?... There I not so much left..."

"But I do not know how to pray, I have never did... I mean, I did enter, rarely, in Churches, but I have never uttered a prayer by myself... I know none..."

"We are going to continue reading the Oratory of the Mother of the Lord, the All Holy Birth Giver of God, from where I left the reading. I read a paragraph, and then you read the following one. We are going to read in whisper, in order not to be heard by the people who would happen to pass by and not to offend them."

He, the Young Captain felt himself a little embarrassed. He had never uttered prayers before, not to mention being in the company of someone... At the beginning those odd words posed him some difficulties in uttering them, like they would have been rejecting him, or keeping him outside. Gabriel was patiently waiting for him to finish the paragraph, like a Father waiting for his child to do his homework...

The few remaining pages had been quickly read, and after that they remained silent, with the cups of tea steaming in front of them. Gabriel had put in that tea a little honey, because he had never been using sugar or salt after his kidney had been removed. He also placed next those cups of tea, some walnuts, saying: "This is the meat of the hermits..."

The weak light of the candle was accentuating the mystery of those moments. He, the Young Captain, he felt that he had found that brother of his, whom he had never known before, but whose existence he had been always knowing about.

"I have felt such a great quietude when we have been reading those prayers. It was like all the other worries had been not important at all and this room we are staying in, it was the Center of the Universe, and we were in a parallel Universe, in another world, a world being outside the time... But I have also felt the fear of remaining trapped, lost, prisoner of this new world I hadn't known before. I felt myself weak, helpless, disoriented..."

"I for one, I do not know how to clarify you these things. In order to find out more about what you are experiencing on the path of the faith, you must search for and find a spiritual guide, a Father, whom to confess your sins, and who will forgive your sins, and who will give a canon of prayer and, after he will consider you as being clean, he will impart you with the Most Holy Body and with the Most Precious Blood of Lord Jesus Christ. All I can tell you is that, if you are found worthy of receiving the knowledge, as the Holy Fathers say, you will see the same things but from another perspective."

"I have felt, though, an internal joy, as I would have been content for fulfilling a pressing duty of mine..."

"This joy is normal to the ones who come for the first time in contact with the holy things, amongst which there is, of

course, the praying. Then it follows the middle stage, when the searching it brings trials and when there predominates the toiling, the ascesis, the sadness, and when there only rarely occurs the joy and only for appeasing the tormented souls. And only a few people in a generation, the chosen ones, only those ones reach the dispassion and find the treasure of love and of the uninterrupted joyfulness.”

Their dialogue had numerous pauses, during which he, the Young Captain, he discovered that he was able to be silent in the presence of father Gabriel without feeling himself embarrassed.

It was past midnight when they had been interrupted by an owl's scream. Though it sounded sinister, it also seemed being in accordance with the nature's rhythms.

“So I heard it in the first months after that surgical intervention I was submitted to... and I was so scared, because I was imagining that it was the sign that death was coming to take me away... The fear of death is dreadful when you have nothing to cling on! I felt myself lost in a killer loneliness, a hopeless one!... Then, and so, I started to pray “being insatiately satiated of the One I was couldn't get satiated with”⁴⁸. Out of the Deluge of living into the world, we are unable to escape except by throwing ourselves in the arms of the Lord, as some small children turning back to their Father, and letting Him all their worries.

And out of the Deluge of the passions we can save ourselves, by the grace of God, by praying, because the prayer gives birth, around our soul, to an Ark that keeps us floating about the muddy and killer waters of the sin.”

“If we feel so well by praying and by being in the presence of each other, when the time of the retirement will come, let's go together up in the Carpathian Mountains and find a hidden place, next to a water spring, and build there a hermitage.”

He, the Young Captain, he didn't know why he said those words... But, as an earnest of that future withdrawal out

⁴⁸ STĂNILOAE, Priest Professor PhD Academician Dumitru. 2008. *The Romanian Philokalia*, volume II, Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary of the Romanian Orthodox Church: Bucharest.

of the world, in deep ascesis, he received from Father Gabriel a volume of *The Romanian Philokalia*.

Motto: “Littera me pavit, sed nescio litter quid sit.”⁴⁹

Awakening 5 – College

He always wanted to graduate a college! It was refused him before, because the Military High Schools’ graduates had only the Military Technical Academy and the Military Medicine Faculty as options.

All specialties from the Military Technical Academy required a very high level of preparedness in mathematics, an object of study he was not so good, despite the fact he was trying so hard and learning by heart all the necessary formulas... he always had this problem of not being able to discern why a certain exercise is solved with a certain formula and in a certain way. So, the only option left to him it was to prepare for sitting the exams to the Military Medicine Faculty. Starting from the third year of High School he had been continuously learning, at the maximum of his intellectual and physical capacities.

Before exams he was able to recite by heart the whole books, even backwards, so he had such great hopes after the exams, because even the questions to be answered weren’t as difficult as he expected.

But he was to endure the first defeat – a defeat followed by many other, all of them having a purpose, but he had back then no clue to understand it. His general average at those exams automatically qualified him for the Officers Military School, at NBRC specialty...

But he felt that first defeat as a very tragic event... His family maybe felt a little bad for his failure, but they didn’t communicate it and they didn’t support him in any way. So him, a young eighteen years old adolescent, he lived with that by himself, in the best way he could. This burden of being constantly alone, of being all the time the one who must solve problems since his early childhood – his or others problems – it exercised on him a constant and awful pressure, affecting his

⁴⁹ Lat. : “The letter disturbs me, but what the letter is I do not know.”

personality and making him to be constantly tense and stressed, even though he rarely showed that in public.

He had never given up his university dream and, even the next year after the Revolution he tried to sit the exams for being accepted to the psycho-sociology faculty, on positions required by the Army at that time. But, the Stalinist way of thinking of the Human Resources – a way of thinking deeply rooted in their mind, giving them that haughty attitude of knowing better what is good or bad for somebody's destiny -, it determined those to send his dossier too late, with the obvious intention to be rejected...

There were only three months left until the recruitment period ended, when he was announced he won't stand any chance to be student at psycho-sociology. He quickly analyzed his other opportunities... The closest University was in the next Big Western City. Because he was working, his only chance to graduate it was that of being allowed a reduced presence, or not presence at all, studying extramural and only sitting the exams.

The Army asked from him everything he had and offered him nothing in exchange... Because the old communist politics and the people applying it were still in place, the officers weren't allowed by any means to enlist and graduate faculties, in order not to become the Army an elitist group... So, he was keenly aware that nobody will give him any official approval to sit exams and to attend a faculty.

That's why he secretly applied, and he started studying hard, mathematics and economy. He thanked for hundred times to his mathematics Teacher, because he remembered everything, and ascertained that he was still able to solve those difficult exercises.

Regarding the economy, he learnt that textbook by heart. He still had that capacity of memorizing...

He was accepted to that University. But the difficult part was only to start. The faculty's library was empty, and even the books from there were useless, because they belonged to the communist revoluted way of thinking the centralized economy in according to the dialectical and historical materialist, the official communist doctrine from before the Revolution.

Only with much difficulty he was able to find some colleague willing to lend him the notes that one had been taking during the classes. When he succeeded in doing that, he stood several days, even twelve-fourteen hours a day on Sundays – because Saturdays were still working days – in order to copy those notes by hand. There were no copy machines back then and even if you managed to find one, having his documents copied was too expensive to him.

There were no up to date books... Although they didn't recognize it, neither the professors were too well informed about what they were teaching the students, because everything seemed in a continual changing. The system of accounts changed, the system of accountancy changed, the system of economical notions changed... And, you had not guaranty that by purchasing a certain book the content of that book will be accepted by your professor...

On top of all the shortcomings, during the “Post-Revolutionary Thaw”, all sort of experiments took place, having the students as Guinea Pigs. One of those experiments was to increase the number of study years from four to five, for the students having regular attendance, and from five to six, for the students studying extramurally and having no regular attendance.

That day of December he al his colleagues were staying at the windows of the classroom, because their professor hadn't arrived yet. In the first two study years, there were a couple of weeks of preparedness before exams, during which the professors were supposed to provide them the answer they had after studying at home.

Outside University, the traffic was awful. As usual, the winter took the authorities by surprise, and nobody did anything regarding the snow transformed in ice that covered the roads and the sidewalks.

Insanely courageous, a cyclist was negotiating that slippery lane of ice towards University, trying to keep his balance. On the back of the bicycle he had a box seeming to a plumber tool box, and his clothes seemed to tell the same thing about him.

Of course that one fell! That box flew away and scattered its content and the bicycle had now a broken front light and a bent handle bar.

His colleagues opened the windows and started mocking that unfortunate man, who answered nothing and limped towards the University's entrance...

And then they had a big shock! That man wasn't at all the University's plumber, but he was their professor of management. No matter how much you had been studying since that unfortunate event happened, you were lucky if he passed you with the minimum score.

"Go home! I am not in the mood to sit this exam with you!" That professor of International Economical Relations, whose object of teaching was to make them learning some English terms, badly translated or not translated at all, concerning the shipping, he was quite sick and almost always bothered by his sufferance. They refuse to leave and he proved he meant it: in less than a half an hour he failed all of them, no matter they knew the answers or not.

"It is from far, the best essay of all!..." he couldn't believe it! Lo, finally, a teacher who appreciated his efforts of learning so hard! They had been given more than seven hundred pages to study for that exam and he fought his way through, by nails and teeth... "But I couldn't pass you. You have some issues with understanding the big picture..." "But I answered correctly all the questions you asked us, and I now all the formulas by heart..." tried he argue that he deserved at least the minimum score... "I see you all in autumn!"

They later found out that the Rector of the University asked the professors to reduce by any means the number of the students from the no attendance form of education, in order to "get rid of those students"...

When he graduated the faculty, from one hundred and forty students who were initially accepted in the first year of study, after six years of constant bullying the Professors exercised on them, for the final exams there was only fourteen of them, and actually graduated only thirteen...

On the way home in that car were him and four colleagues, all of them freshly graduates. The barrier was down because a train was to cross that road, and they stopped.

He got off that car and hanged the banner he had – describing the economical flux in a hospital – on that tree. Three prostitutes waiting there for clients came and stared at that banner, being maybe worried not to say something about forbidding them doing their trade there... But after a little while those prostitutes understood that there was nothing forbidding anything they were doing, so they laughed at it and went back to their occupation – like the Professors of those muddy times, charmed by a “savage democracy”, no understanding anything about the real democracy, but not being stopped anymore – after the communism fell – by anything, doing everything they wanted unimpeded not even by moral principles they didn’t had anyway...

He thought: “It is true, darlings! The School offer you information, but it cannot educated you if you do not want to!”

Motto: “Nomina si nescis, perit et cognition rerum.”⁵⁰

Sign 4 – Food for Sinners

He was at that training course from where, because he lacked the necessary means, he went home only once at every two weeks. He had no car, and the trip with the train it was too expensive to him. So he spent many weekends in that caserne, alone, for he was from the farthest location.

That Military Unit was situated at almost thirty kilometers from the Capital City and at two kilometers from that Village scattered along the road.

At the western end of that Village there was a Monastery. On the Sundays he didn't go home, he attended the Holy Liturgy at the Church of that Monastery.

Around the Church there were small wooden houses, almost covered all over in flowers. The small fences were some of them leaned over, some of them totally collapsed. The tin roofs were rusted, and the plaster from those walls made of mud bricks, it was falling down in patches, due to the humid ground... But it wasn't there, at all about, laziness or about lack of care!... It was instead about guarding the vote of poverty and the lack of attachment to the worldly things... Those flowers seemed growing up from the pure soil of the serenity of those clean souls...

He wondered when he saw so many people, for the Monastery's yard was crowded. The adults were standing in small groups, waiting for the celebration to begin, and the children, full of energy, they were horsing around.

“It must be today an important Holiday, but I have no idea at all!” he thought.

That Holy Liturgy didn't seem to be different, as far as he could say. He occupied a place somewhere on the right hand of the middle of the Church. He never liked it to stay in the front, close to the altar, because there were staying the

⁵⁰ Lat.: “If you do not know their names, the knowledge of the things it will vanish too.”

most zealous believers and the ones who wanted to be seen by others as important persons...

The Priest started walking the Church with the censer, spreading all around a very good fragrance and, when arriving next to him, that one gave him an odd look. "It was, maybe, because I am dressed up in blue jeans suit..." he thought.

At the end of the celebration, the Priest lowered that large Icon, wonders doer, of the Mother of the Lord, The crowd thronged there in order to kiss that icon and to touch it with their hand and with their foreheads and to rub it with the clothes they brought, clothes belonging to ill people who followed to wear them in order to be healed.

He avoided that scrimmage. He could never understood why the people behave like savages in the Lord's Church, thronging each other, trampling each other, like a horde, crushing on each other... Why wasn't there possible to wait for you turn in order and in silence?!...

After around an hour, the crowd was already gone, and he was able to reach that Icon without pushing anyone away... But he wasn't convinced at all that that Icon was wonder doer. Reaching in front of It, he marked upon himself the Sign of the Cross and he kissed that Icon, like any believer fulfilling his duty of respecting a Tradition he doesn't believe in.

He passed forwards and he reached in the front of that Priest who handed him over a few pieces of wafer, he looked him in the eyes in a certain manner, almost with pity, and he said a few words to him:

"Food for sinners!..."

He felt how that look of that Priest penetrated to the most hidden corners of his soul. He had the sensation that that One knew everything about him, like not even himself was able to see it before... but, strangely, he didn't feel the need of hiding. It seemed he was in front of a doctor who was assessing his state of health and, in the same time, that One was making him understand the ailment he had.

A great serenity engulfed him, interwoven with joyfulness, like he never felt it before. He smiled gratefully, and said:

"Thank You, Father!"

The Priest smiled too, for he saw that he understood it!

Motto: “Ubi crux, ubi lux.”⁵¹

Octagon 3 – Father David

He jumped on the mobile phone as somebody could save his friend... and, crying, he called Father David, without knowing what he was doing that for, because he only met Him recently. It was already night and he should have though his phone call could bother the recipient...

“Father!... He died!... I called him in order to see was he doing, and his wife answered the phone and gave me the tragic news... “Father Mihai passed away...” she told me... I felt myself so lonely, so deserted, that I had been engulfed by desperation...”

He told Father David about his friend, who was sick with cancer in terminal phase. On that occasion he mimicked he was strong, but surely Father Mihai, the ones they were speaking about, knew his real feelings....

That night, when he found that news, it was for the first time he had a panic attack. The darkness seemed to choke him with a muddy thick mist rushing upon him from all directions, and a terrible dread, without having a clear motif, it overwhelmed him. While breathing hastily, gasping for air, he was searching for a reason to convince himself that there was nothing to be afraid of, but that objectless fear didn't leave him just because it had no object. He went in the balcony, and then he entered back the room, trying to not betray himself because he was ashamed by his wife and children... on top of that, he was so afraid of calling an ambulance, not because of him, but rather because of his family's scare and because of the crisis such an event would have been brought it in the order of the things and of the rhythms of his life; he didn't had even a new pajamas to take it with him to the hospital... the neighbors would have been gossiped him... and they would have been secretly hoping that he had died – in order to feed their own illusory “immortality”...

⁵¹ Lat.: “Where is the Cross, there is the Light.”

"I don't even know what I am going to do!... He left behind three small children... I don't even know if his wife could provide for those children... Father Mihai's health seemed to be a little better, he hoped for a possibility to be cured, to the last moment... He had been fasting for forty days while he had been provided chemotherapy... How must I understand his death, Father? And why him?!... for he was a Saint!..."

His voice was choked with tears. That dialogue was rather a monologue. He didn't want answers but he rather wanted the communion in sufferance, he wanted his pain to be shared, and the words he uttered were only a cry for help...

They established to see each other the next day, because such a discussion on spiritual themes cannot be efficient whether is held via telephone.

"Yesterday, you have been so disappointed..."

"I cannot understand why him!... He was such a kind man! He was totally lacking evilness!..."

"The thoughts of God aren't like the thoughts of the people. Maybe Father Mihai's mission on earth it had come to an end. By believing this, we do not do but to help him and to help ourselves."

Father David came on foot, for that was some kind of penitence he undertook, if not obliged to do otherwise. He was wearing a rucksack matching his uniform of military priest. His beard was blond-reddish, framing a skinny face. His body also bore the signs of the asceticism.

"How his family will cope with the situation?... Are they able to make a living for themselves?"

"If we take too much worry and care, upon ourselves, we will reduce the help God wants to grant us, because we reject His kindness by considering the sufferance bad and by not knowing that each sufferance leads to salvation."

On Both sides of that road there were chestnut trees, casting shadows of shadow on that soil recently watered by the rain that fell earlier. That fresh and cold air was penetrating their souls...

They continued the discussion until there was nothing more to be said. Father David had an infinite patience and he remained there even the interlocutor left; he seemed to heal

the wound opened in that place by so many unanswerable questions...

He, the Young Captain left without receiving the answers he was asking for, but he felt to much better! Father David only conveyed him some rational arguments he could use, but those arguments weren't something new to him. He knew about them before, but that dialogue opened his capacity of accepting and transforming those arguments in certitudes. That was what Father David conveyed him together, above, and even outside the words he told him: namely a capacity to trust those things, beyond their theoretical acceptation. Now he was able to feel those things, to perceive them strongly.

He recalled those words of Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae: "In the last analyze, it can be said about the known world: I believe that it exists, and about the world of faith: I know that it exists."⁵²

⁵² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ or the Man's Restoration*, OMNISCOP Publishing House, Craiova, 1993, p. 53.

Motto: “Nemo sibi nascitur.”⁵³

Deluge 2 – Promise

That summer with very high temperatures and with that invasion of already expired food – even having fake labels – the food poisoning wreaked havoc on children.

His daughter was admitted in the hospital in a quite grave state, because in those two days they tried to treat her at home, not being aware of the state she was in, the general state of the girl was rapidly deteriorating.

When the health state was evaluated, the medics were quite worried. That girl was already quite skinny because of his bodily constitution having constant troubles in what concerns eating enough, and now the sickness had affected her very dramatically.

An element that frightened them a lot it was the fact that the girl had hallucinations because of the dehydration state.

He left his wife to the hospital in order to take care of their daughter and he went back home. He was desperate. He felt himself helpless, for nothing he could do it would have been helpful. He felt himself guilty and he reproached to himself the lack of care...

He bought a bottle of alcohol – as it was this the solution... – in order to feel that he was doing something manly, and drank it.

Again, he got very drunk. He didn't know how to drink. He swallowed the alcohol like it was some food. Once his stomach overwhelmed by so much alcohol, he started to feel sick, increasingly sick, to the limit of the supportability.

He thought that, in the state he was in, he was helpless, handicapped. Drunk as he was, he wouldn't have been able to go to the hospital to help his daughter, or even to see her...

He was mad with rage! But he was also flooded with a feeling of despair! What if he was to end like any alcoholic,

⁵³ Lat.: “Nobody is born for himself.”

peeing on his pants, and dying in a trench?!... What was that it determined him to drink?!... Who could help him if he was unable to help himself?!...

“Virgin Mary, Mother of the Lord, please help my daughter healing and I am promising You that I won’t drink alcohol ever!”

Only if he only knew, back then, that he was to keep his promise after another thirty years of suicidal alcoholism!...

Motto: “Abiectioni falsa pietatis et religionis species est et quamvis abiectio superbiae sit contraria, est tamen abiectus superbo proximus.”⁵⁴

Prodigal Son 1 – Rediscovering the Paterikon

He had only a prayer left that he was able to utter it: The Prayer of the Holy Cross. Everything else had deserted him, and he had deserted everything else: the Church, the fasting, the prayer... But in the night, before going to bed, he was telling this last prayer, in the attempt to avoid totally forgetting about the holy things.

After a short period he fiery lived all the things related to the faith, his soul had become cold and upon his heart, so warm before, it had been laid the nescience, the forgetfulness, and the idle carelessness. He was living mechanically, instinctively, no longer looking up at the high things. He had descended in a grey ravine where it seemed to be only one direction to follow: downwards.

Then, on a day, after he seemed to have laid over the eyes of his mind, a veil separating him from seeing the rationalities placed by God within things, he found again the Paterikon, that plain showing of the life and of the high measures the Holy Father of the Wilderness had reach at. He started browsing it, because he was impeded to consciously wanting to read it. Then, he saw here and there an interesting word, and then he recalled a saying, and, without realizing it, he started reading that book.

He remembered that he once passed by the cathedral and he saw two monks in a car that stopped a little in front of the entrance, and both of them marked upon themselves the sign of the Cross, and then they continued their trip. “They did like we, the militaries, do when passing by a Superior: we look at him and we salute Him...” he thought.

⁵⁴ Lat.: “Self-despising is a false form of honesty and of religiousness; and, if the self-despising it is the opposite of the haughtiness, though, the one who despises himself he is very similar to the haughty one.”

Reading the Paterikon was giving him the feeling that he finally discovered the things he had been looking for ever since he had been born. He was so well while reading; he felt again like back home, when, in his childhood, he had lost to the world and to himself, and reading every book he was coming across with.

He thought those words of the one who wrote the Preface were so interesting. That one affirmed that, in what regards the spiritual ascension, that book is dangerous as skiing on a mountain could be. But that one also told that, more than the Paterikon, the Philokalia is dangerous like a climbing on rock could be, because when reading the Philokalia you have to gear up with all the necessary elements and to leave yourself in the care of some much more experienced alpinist, because the danger of falling lurks every step you take.

Wilderness's Fathers, as they shown in the words they wrote, or as others wrote about them, They seemed to him as some good friends of his, as some wise grandpas, as some warriors full of scars inflicted to them by the material and spiritual battles they fought.

He was especially impressed by the story of that ascetic who, without ever knowing the touch of a woman – because he lived ever since he was very young withdrawn from the world and tirelessly working for his salvation – he still was fought for eight years by the evil ghost of the fornication. But he didn't despair, he was patient, he fought, he suffered, and he prayer, and, in the end, the ghost left him like a wild boar, and he threw himself with the whole force and wrath and faith he had towards that boar in order to banish it away from himself. And how, even two weeks after, that hermit's hands still smelled so badly, no matter how much we washed them up.

"Neither have I any pleasure when drinking. Why am I drinking then?!... Will I be tormented for eight years like that Father was?!..."

Motto: “Semel pro semper.”⁵⁵

Banishing 8 – Congo

During the almost eleven months he spent in the Country after finishing the mission in Eritrea, he had sat like on thorns.

“What do you feel as more difficult now that you are back at home?” he was asked by a colleague.

“To adapt myself again to the abnormality’s state!... Abroad I was respected as man and as officer. I had much heavier and much more complicated tasks than the ones I have here, but I managed to work and fulfill everything I was requested to without feeling so much stressed. We are making everything here to be much more difficult because we have no respect for each other. We like, due to our lack of manners and education, to make the people we are leading to feel lack of satisfaction and guilt. We “solve” our ego and we forget about the problem... I heard before, from other colleagues turning back to the Country, that they had problems to adapt again to the idiotic working atmosphere from here, but I didn’t think it could be so hard! To be honest with you, I thought they exaggerated... Now I know I was so wrong!”

So, his main activity was to find out a way to leave again for a UNO’s mission abroad. He was constantly searching for an escape from the misery he landed in.

Before Eritrea, he had never been bothered by the abnormality which was so obvious now, because he had believed that that was what the normality looked like... like normal had seemed to him the torments he had been subjected to, during the Military High School and the Officers Military School... After the Revolution he watched on TV a documentary about the Communist Prisons and he ascertained that, except the systematic beating the political detainees were subjected too, and, of course, here must be mentioned the different scale, he experienced almost the entire range of means of terror those

⁵⁵ Lat.: “Once and for all.”

poor human beings endured. And there was also another big difference: he did only seven years time in!...

There still was penury of English speakers, though the competition intensified quite much. But the selection commission still believed he had a very high placed protection – and, between us, he had such a very High Protector but he knew nothing about that... -, so that he was summoned again for the preparation period and after another three weeks, he landed in Kinshasa, the Capital City of the so-called “Democratic” Republic of Congo.

He felt like he was going back in time: a time of another kind of childhood. He was again happy, though, on the other hand, he knew very well how dangerous was the situation in Congo. MONUSCO⁵⁶ was taking place in the conditions of a state divided between tribes and militias, led by thirsty of blood leaders who claimed the domination of diverse areas and they mercilessly oppressed, terrorized, and killed the population they were submitting to slavery, in order to exploit the reserves of very rare and strategically important minerals: uranium, cobalt, diamonds... you name it.

But he was there in searching for that respect he felt in Eritrea. And of course, respect meant also those sums of few thousand dollars a month he was paid during the mission, in addition to his usual salary his family received it in the Country; that money meant a decent living as any military should have! And, the last but not the least, there was also about searching the adventure, mixed with a vague sense of freedom.

After the initial training in Capital City, he was assigned to a team in Boma, close to the border with Angola.

The odd and mixed history Congo it had, both the recent one and the one far back in time, made the Country to be exposed to diverse groups of mercenaries from Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Chad, and Sudan, and who knows from where...

The team from Boma lived daily under the threat of Congolese locals. Actually, as he ascertained, the Congolese are

⁵⁶ The Mission of the United Nations in Congo, the biggest in what concerned the personnel and having the most comprising mandate UNO ever had before.

so divided than they don't have a national conscience. The only ones which matter are the tribal connections. Even president Mobuto's attempts – who re-baptized the Country from Congo in Zaire, the capital City from Leopoldville in Kinshasa, Stanleyville in Kisangani, Elisabethville in Lubumbashi, on the purpose of forming a national conscience – failed... he even changed his own name in Mobuto Sese Seko Koko Ngbendu Wa Za Banga...

The team was executing consciously their missions, and then they were benefiting of free time for relaxing. The Villa they were accommodated in it had a swimming pool, so they could swim as often as they wanted.

But that morning everything seemed to go wrongly. He and his South-African friend were late at work. That reddish dirt road was so dusty! The day before, they were provided the information that in Kinshasa there were some uprisings and the Government crossed on the other side of the River⁵⁷.

In their hurry – they better wouldn't have gone that day at work! –, the two officers forgot to verify if the road was safe. So, they came across a group of several dozens of people, discontent, agitated, predisposed to become violent. The shock wave of the uprisings from the Capital City reverberated even here, though the poor life from here had nothing to do with the things which happened in Kinshasa.

Characteristic to Congo is that in not time, nobody knows from where, many people can gather in a certain place. There appear passersby, supporters, and some people who try to pinch something... So it was also that time! In a few minutes that group grew up to almost a hundred persons.

UNO's Observers were thoroughly trained how to cope with such situations. But, of course, while the flight attendants "dance" before taking off, everybody watch them bored, because nobody believes that it could happen right to him to be involved in a plane crash!... But during those moments the two Observers recalled so keenly the things they were told about

⁵⁷ The Congo River cuts in half, besides Capital City Kinshasa, also the following important Cities: Kindu, Kisangani, Bumba, Mbandaka, Boma, and Banana. Actually, these settlements developed on both sides of the River; this River is a main resource the life in Democratic Republic of Congo benefits of.

the way of being the Congolese people have. They challenge you, the push you and throng you, but they rarely attacked you if they felt you weren't afraid of them. If they thronged you, you mustn't push them back, but they neither must feel you weak on your feet. If they cursed you, you must answer them by smiling at them with disgust, but never to curse them back... this last recommendation was more easily to respect because the two Observers didn't know the language. And in French or in English cursed only the educated Congolese...

The whole event lasted for less than a half an hour. That horrific humid heat started to be choking; so that, as abruptly as it started, that conflict ended suddenly. The two Observers remained standing in the middle of the road, quite shaken, but still unharmed.

"They wanted a souvenir from my uniform. Luckily, that souvenir it wasn't me..." he joked, while showing to his colleague the missing epaulette.

They laughed half-heartedly, a nervous and hasty laughter, like a nervous discharge, and like a denial gesture of the mortal danger they were just passed through. They knew the fatalities amongst the UNO personnel in Congo were quite high... their series recorded fourteen losses...

They hurried up to headquarter where they arrived sweated all over, rather because of the stress reaction than because of the heat. The first thought was to barricade there, in order not to be taken by surprise... Then they analyzed if it was opportune to call the Pakistani Battalion to help them – the Pakistani Battalion was allowed to carry weapons and to fire at the attackers... Finally, they filled in their reports and then hurried up back to the Villa.

Their colleagues already knew about the incident for they had been informed by Papa Paul, a local Congolese. That one was French Teacher and, in order not to starve to death, he was coming to cook for them.

An Indian Officer in that team always had carried with him his favorite spices, with which he was able to make even the cassava tasty... that whitish, sticky, watery, tasteless polenta made out of manioc flour, a staple food not lacking any Congolese meal.

“Papa Paul, I am going to cook today. My intention is to teach you how to cook a special meal in order to raise the moral of your colleagues who - praise to Shiva - escaped without being slaughtered by your conationals whom we defend with so much love, and whom we are toys, when they decide they need to kill somebody without being punished... but, please do not be upset by my words - added him seeing the resigned but in the same time disapproving look of Papa Paul - because you are not the only one guilty of that!...”

“Oh! Mon Dieu!”⁵⁸ - It was everything the targeted one answered.

That night's dinner it was worthy of the glorious return from the battle field of the team's heroes. That Indian Whiskey flowed incessantly, the atmosphere warmed up, and the tongues got unleashed... here also - that probably was a characteristic of the UNO's missions - there were a Pakistani and an Indian. The other two colleagues were a South-African and a quite up-nosed Dutch, and him, the Romanian. But in those moments they got along very well, communicating beyond their words, with their gestures, with their laughter...

The party went deep in the night and, tired and melancholic, they stopped talking and started dreaming of their lives from the Countries they were coming from...

“Papa Paul, I know how to liberate myself from the burden the today's event it loaded up on my heart! You will teach me French language and I will pay you for that. I think it is impossible that from this Paradise, which Congo is!, and where you are living, so sadly, the torments of the hell in, not to be I able to leave with something important, who knows, maybe for my future! What do you say?”

“We are going to start even from tomorrow. You will see what the craftsmanship of French language, a Congolese teacher has it, it looks like! Even though I feel this like teaching French a representative of the White People who were cutting off, only a few decades ago, the hands and the legs of my grandparents in order to press them into slavery and to keep

⁵⁸ French: “Oh, my God!”

them into slavery! Sometimes they were beaten to death in from of their families with the intention to spread fear...”⁵⁹

Papa Paul left silently. There was nothing else to be said.

“I wonder how much hatred have these people accumulated?... How could be they able to forgive, if ever?!... That could happen maybe only whet they will end truly and wholly to belong to themselves... And we, how could we endure this sufferance of theirs?... What will I do?...”

The “team stage” came close to the end and again, for he had been noticed for his efficient work, he was proposed the renewal of the contract and if he agreed, he was to be transferred to the Headquarters from Kinshasa.

“I am going to take a tour of the surroundings, to imprint my mind with the spirit of these places I probably won’t see ever again, though they will remain forever in my souls!...” though him.

He left on foot, preparing thus, to himself, the auspices of the second big danger that mission he was in. He entered the outskirts and left the locality by following that reddish dusty road crossing through those painfully intense and freshly green fields. Sparse trees profiled their canopies on that blues sky at the horizon, raising their loneliness in the middle of the tall grass.

As in a Hitchcock movie, that would have had a script from Kafka, people were appearing from everywhere, from all directions, sometimes lonely children, crossing that savanna towards destinations known only by them. He, the Young Major remained stupefied by seeing that scenery of people going everywhere, not being him able to understand how they could add a direction to their walk, in that immense – despite of the presence of those people – wilderness.

⁵⁹ Consequently to the exploitation of the Congolese population and to the illnesses spread by the White People, between 1885 and 1908, there died between 5 and 15 million people (the general admitted number is 5 millions). A Governmental Commission drew the conclusion that the Congo’s population was cut in half during that brutal period. In order to be used as repressive means it was founded the Force Publique (FP). This militia, organized like a small army, it used in many cases practices as cutting off the hands or the legs of the natives.

A big and reddish Sun announced him that in maximum an hour the night was going to fall. For so are the things in Africa: everything comes so quickly: the sunrise, the sunset, the rain, the draught, the fury, and the joyfulness...

When he tried to enter back the village, there were two militiamen, from the so many militias existing in Congo, who stretched a rope across the road and, with their submachine guns hanging on their shoulders, they were asking for a "passing fee" from the people trying to pass by there. It wasn't something unheard of by any means, but a current practice on those places... as also the habit of the militias to attack the villages for killing, raping, stealing, and setting the whole settlements in fire... as also the habit of the locals to revenge their losses by torturing and then killing the militiamen they captured, no matter they had any connection with what happened or not...

"You have to pay us a thousand franks!"

That wide and wanting to be glacial smile, it unveiled those white teeth stuck in those pinkish gums...

To him, a thousand franks were nothing. The Congolese currency was so badly affected by inflation... But the two makeshift tax collectors couldn't ask for too much money, because their conationals hadn't the necessary means to pay. They were asking those people maybe fifty or at most a hundred franks. But to him, to the White Man, they decided to ask for ten times more money.

But he, the Young Major, he felt himself forced to fight back, to riposte, to not consent to that abuse, which, otherwise, he would have had authorized it. If even him would have accepted such a state of fact, how could the ordinary Congolese oppose that... he was there to protect the ordinary people... as usual, the stubbornness he was living his principledness with, it wasn't letting him get easily out of the trap he fell in...

"Vous n'avez pas l'autorisation de prélever cette taxe! Je vais me plaindre à votre commandant! Je suis un officier d'ONU!"⁶⁰, he told them, with a harsh and loud voice, knowing

⁶⁰ French: „You aren't authorized to levy this tax! I will file a complaint to your commander! I am a UNO's officer!"

that he must play the card of the self-assumed importance and toughness. "Lean on other one's fear!" he remembered that that Franciscan monk said - a character from the story wrote by Umberto Eco: "The Name of the Rose"...

"Excuse nous, s'il vous plait, monsieur l'officier! Nous n'avons pas connu que..."

„Assez! Annulez-vous immédiatement votre point douanier!"⁶¹

Those militiamen vanished immediately on their motorbike, even forgetting there the rope that constituted the mobile border they instituted there... and, of course, forgetting about the fact they had submachine guns and he was unarmed...

Reaching back the villa, he had mixed feelings. It seemed that he did a good thing, and he congratulated himself for that. But what was the importance of the small battle he won, in comparison to the deluge of injustices and sufferance flooding all over that Country and drowning the hopes of the population?!... Corruption, violence, crime: all of these were there like at home. It seemed like by not being able to express their hatred they had on the people who exploited them so mercilessly, these tormented and maimed souls ended to hate each other and even on themselves.

He fell in a tormented sleep and he had nightmares the whole night. It seemed he must leave with the helicopter but he wasn't able to find the place for taking off. The more he was trying, the more he got lost. Then, he saw that helicopter at the horizon, but the "military kids", kidnapped and forcedly pressed into militias, they were coming from all directions, crossing that infinite savanna, and they were clinging on him, crying, and asking him to give their childhood back...

Kinshasa was far way agitated than Boma. That enough modern City, having tarmac and paved roads, with building of European inspiration, it was overflowing with life. The suburbs were excessively crowded. Shacks made out of cardboard, of straws, or you wonder out of what else, they were hiding lost

⁶¹ French: "Please excuse us, officer! We didn't know... // That's enough! Do immediately annul your tax collecting point!"

destinies behind those approximate walls. Generalized were there only the poverty and the hunger and the lack of hope...

That child's hand, that he grabbed it in his own hand, it seemed unbelievable tiny: there were some soft bones held together by that wrinkled and almost transparent skin.

That hand was stretched forward asking for alms... he placed next to that child the small bunch of bananas he just bought. Looking at that child, he was impressed by those eyes seeming not to have any light, eyes one could read only suffering and resignation within.

He left with a bitter soul. How was he able to eat, while other people were starving to death, literally?!... What kind of world he was living in, a world throwing away billions of dollars in food, only for satisfying its lust for vain glory, and billions of people dies because they had nothing to eat?!...

"Your Country is one of the richest on the Planet, but your people still dies with hunger..."

"Please spare me with the People! They are lazy! They cannot be trusted! Don't waste your time by feeling sorrow for those former peasants who are now lumpenproletariat⁶²!..."

That Congolese saying those words, feeling so much contempt addressed to the own People, he was a partaker to the so called "évolués"⁶³, namely that social layer formed out of the few fortunate who had the chance to graduate a school, some of them even graduated the University abroad, often in Belgium – that such a civilized European Country to which Congo was its former Colony... It was again about that perverse love the victim feels for his executioner...

Later on, he, the Young Major, he understood that Congo was even more divided than he previously thought, because the diverse social layers were full of hatred for each other. The poor ones hated the conationals who succeeded somehow to break the social barriers and to stay closer to their former – but, in fact, present – European masters. On the other hand, the less successful "evolved" hated the ones who had

⁶² German: people not having a stable work place, invading the cities after they left their villages in their attempt to survive and they end to thicken the numbers of the poor layer of the population, who inhabit the outskirts of the big cities.

⁶³ French: evolved.

more success. The American and the Europeans Multinationals, having vast properties and great businesses in Congo, they despised the Congolese and treated them like some upstarts and like stewards, considering them, in the same time, totally capable of cutting their throats off whether a Revolution would had started there... Actually, nobody was safe while travelling outside the oases they created for isolating themselves from the poor people.

A phenomenon the UNO's mission there had mandate to watch upon, in order to prevent it, it was the kidnapping of young children, by the diverse militias, with the intention to forcibly transform those children in militiamen. Information were coming from everywhere regarding the crimes those children were committing all over the Country. Their cruelty was so easily to induce because of their lack of discernment... and because they had not education to oppose insanity...

An anonymous phone call announced that in one of the Kinshasa's outskirts appeared a child, around thirteen years old, threatening everybody with a pistol he had. The police patrol sent to the specified place brought that child to the Mission's headquarters in order to find out as much as possible, from him, about his kidnappers. But it was in vain!... That child was in state of shock, or he maybe had lost his sanity because of the tortures he was submitted to. All he was doing it was to raise and point an incomplete pistol, aiming everyone around; he probably succeeded to escape the militia that kept him slave, or his kidnappers simply didn't care about the fact he was leaving, because he was already useless. That child followed to be admitted to a mental care institution, where he received a bowl of cassava and a few mugs of water per day... who do you think could offer him medical treatment and medicines?!...

Children escaping starvation and militias, they were put to work by their own parents. They were working everything - I mean everything!

He recalled those two children breaking that reddish stone in pieces. One of them had a hammer and a chisel, and he was trying to detach pieces of rock from that stone wall. Daily carving shaped there quite a cave. The second one had a basket he was loading up with pieces of stone and carrying it to

the depositing place. That rock was instable and it could collapse in any moment upon the workers. But they were working relentlessly, despite the danger... How hard could be to see such things while comparing with the situation of the children from elsewhere, who are cursing their good life, and cursing their parents, and cursing their teachers, and not knowing what to do because of such a good living they have...

The children stonemasons, despite their hard and relentless work, they barely succeeded to earn enough to eat.

And upon everything you could see and think at and feel there, it was settling down that storm of sharp colors the Congolese's clothing had, as a huge restlessness, as a stormy weeping, addressed to "the ones who had ears to hear" and eyes to see and hearts to feel...

Motto: “Loqui ignorabit qui tacere noscient.”⁶⁴

Ark 7 – Father Nicolae Dela Rohia

It seemed inappropriate to him to mark on himself with the sign of the Cross when passing by the Churches. He thought the people will see him and will blame him for Pharisaism, for he remembered those words asking him to take care and do the good things in hidden, so that God, Who is in hidden, and Who sees him in hidden, to reward him.

“But, am I not ashamed of the Lord, so that he will be ashamed of me?!...”

It seemed that so many possibilities existed, concerning the way you are judging the things related to the faith, as many as the inquisitive mind wants to conceive. All the things seem to be good and bad. And then, wherefrom could he find out which way to choose?

Even the things commonly considered as being good, in certain circumstances they seem to be bad. As for instance, there it would be the mercy. Having too much mercy on somebody it makes you thinking that God doesn't help that person and you, because of your vain glory, you sometimes upraise yourself against the will of God...

One of his colleagues know him as a passionate reader and that one offered him to bring him the four books Nicolae Steinhardt wrote, or which contain dialogues with him recorded by diverse reporters. He, the Young Major, he accepted that offer with much interest, because he hadn't had before any contact with the work and with the life of the Jewish Romanian writer who, after being imprisoned in the communist era he converted himself to Christianity in prison and after being released from prison he took the path of the monasticism, becoming Father Nicolae dela Rohia.

Those vacation days in November, watered by rains and blown by winds and flooded with boredom, offered him no rest. He had nothing to do during the day when remained alone. The

⁶⁴ Lat.: “It won't know how to speak that one who doesn't know how to be silent.”

TV channels bored him to death. He was stubbornly changing the channels, consuming the remote control's battery and getting a pain in the thumb, in searching for a worthy to be seen report.

On the middle shelf of his library he saw those books his colleague gave him. He took the first one and read the title: "The Journal of the happiness". He opened it randomly, as he does it each time he has an unknown book, in order to rapidly get a first impression upon the content, and he stumbled upon a phrase, which seemed him – who was at that time if not an atheist, at least an undecided and formal Christian – as being an exaggeration: "(...) the true grounds of the Christian conception are «the absurd and the paradox»"⁶⁵...

"How could he say such a blasphemy?!" thought him.

To him, the words "absurd" and "paradox" had negative connotations. And as determining the subject *Christendom*, it seemed to be the apostate affirmation of an atheist.

He accepted the challenge of reading that book, despite the feeling that he was doing something wrong, feeling himself partaker with the author to those inappropriate affirmation regarding the Christian faith.

If there it was only about "paradox" it would be more acceptable. His conscience would have accepted that in the conditions he regarded the "idealism" of the Christendom as impossible to apply in practice, and therefore its dogmas could have been considered as paradoxical... But the other word bewildered him and in the same time scared him...

It wasn't for the first that that he felt this fear of assuming a seemingly dangerous conviction which, once assumed and accepted, it would have changed definitively his life!

Fearful, in the general meaning of the word, he wasn't. Rather he considered himself even a courageous guy. He was ordering and controlling his own life as correctly and as efficiently possible. He was doing everything he could in order to provide for his family, for a decent living.

⁶⁵ Steinhardt, Nicolae. 1999. Dacia Publishing House: Cluj-Napoca, p. 18.

But he was terrified when he must cede this control, this self-confidence, this position of being him that one who decides, him the one being right, him...

That fear was impeding him to abdicate from his own self! He wasn't very afraid of those bullets whistling, when passing by his ears, the song of death, but he would have never accepted that it wasn't himself the one who saved him, for his training, for his capacity of making rapid decisions, and for his power of remaining calm in limit situations. In other words, he believed that he was the one whom he owed his survival.

Steinhardt's words let him no alternative. Those words didn't negotiate with him, and they didn't let him escape by being complacent in that lukewarm vision of the Christian he thought he was. He understood that he wasn't allowed to drink the Wine mixed with water. Because Father Steinhardt showed that:

"Shredded guts, sweat, blood, mockery, and nails – this is the Christendom, my boy."⁶⁶

Or:

"The impossible - that is required from you."⁶⁷

He understood that the two epithets he perceived with fear, in the beginning, when he opened that book, they actually tried to shake off his idleness and complacency he was living in.

Everything Father Nicolae dela Rohia said, it could be summarized in a sole word: Courage! Father Nicolae asked him to dare:

"As long as we do not exit the possible, and the accountancy, we cannot conceive the Paradise."⁶⁸

But Father Nicolae was doing this urging towards courage while mentioning how scared he was due to the terror he was submitted to:

"I am terribly afraid; I didn't know how fearful I am."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Steinhardt, Nicolae. 1999. Dacia Publishing House: Cluj-Napoca, p. 29.

⁶⁷ Steinhardt, Nicolae. 1999. Dacia Publishing House: Cluj-Napoca, p. 30.

⁶⁸ Steinhardt, Nicolae. 1999. Dacia Publishing House: Cluj-Napoca, p. 36.

⁶⁹ Steinhardt, Nicolae. 1999. Dacia Publishing House: Cluj-Napoca, p. 46.

He was discovering, little by little, while reading, his fear. He was discovering how his fear of not being in control, it flooded all the aspects of his life.

And Father Nicolae dela Rohia unveiled him this Ark of the Courage to Dare to let himself led by God, to leave his own wills in order to follow the Will of God. And this in the conditions in which:

“And there was nothing from anywhere.”⁷⁰

That Ark must make him floating above what Father Nicolae described, by using a quote from Simone Weil:

“The things we are chained to, they are unreal, but the bonds tying us to them, they are very real.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Steinhardt, Nicolae. 1999. Dacia Publishing House: Cluj-Napoca, p. 38.

⁷¹ Steinhardt, Nicolae. 1999. Dacia Publishing House: Cluj-Napoca, p. 91.

Motto: “Cui dolet meminit.”⁷²

Awakening 6 – Living for Others

“Lo, She was refused the flowers, the fragrances, the colors...”

He didn't even feel the need to cry. This Grandma of his, She passed away so naturally, so that Her departure it excluded, in a way, the mourning.

Outside was so cold than the faces of the present ones were bluish. But there was no snow... the whole world was grey, from earth to skies.

The funeral service was officiated in a little hurry because it was so cold and the people were trembling. The funeral procession started moving and advancing towards the cemetery, taking short stops at each crossroads it met in its way, for giving the reposed soul time to take goodbye.

Above, there was a heavy, leaden sky, pressing down on that sparse light that it was barely able to keep the darkness back.

“She was always there for us - for me. Actually she was the one who raised me, because my mother was at work the whole day. Grandma fed me and dressed me up while I was going to primary and secondary school. She prepared my luggage each time I left for High School, and She accompanied me to the train station. Then she did the same when I was going to the Officers Military School. Curiously, my mother started loving me, or at least that was the moment she started showing it, after I gave her, her first granddaughter. It seemed then that some bridges were rebuilt, bridges which were broken after the death of my Father, when I was two years old. But She, the Grandma, She was always there.

My Grandma was there for her husband, for her brothers, and for her sisters, and for my Father, and for two of Her children, by taking care of all of them during their sufferance and burying them.

⁷² Lat.: “The one who feels the pain, he remembers it.”

She was there for us, Her grandsons and granddaughters, by raising us and taking care of us...

And her mission came to an end when She no longer had somebody to take care of!...

And She floated ascended to heavens, for Her beloved ones were waiting for Her there...

How could be possible, I wonder, to live your entire life for others?!..."

Motto: “Non caret is quod non desiderat.”⁷³

Sign 5 – Monastic Cell

He didn't want to go to that trip, for he was quite a sedentary man. He always preferred to comfortably sit on a couch, watching the TV set, or reading. When finding a good book, he spent his whole time reading it until he finished it.

He ceded to his wife's insistence, even if he argued that travelling with a small child wouldn't be so pleasant.

The result was that, after he vainly tried to make her change her mind, they were travelling on that mountain road leading them towards that nuns Monastery they planned to visit.

The chauffeur was driving quite imprudently, wanting to demonstrate the driving skills he had, so that he entered that double curve having too much speed and they almost fell in that precipice on the right side of the road. The very good technical state of the car saved them unharmed...

There wasn't so much to see at that Monastery. There was order, there was discretion, there was quietude, there was impeccable cleanness... as everywhere in Monasteries... but he wasn't so impressed by such things... His ears were ringing because of those so long hours he spent on the back seat of that car, and he was quite bored.

“Let's go back at home! We have nothing more to see here!...”

“Maybe you would want to see the monastic cell of that Hermit who lived in asceticism on the edge of the precipice on that mountain from above the Monastery! You can reach it if you will follow the Path upwards, to that cemetery, and then take it to the right, while still ascending...”

The one giving them that information was an old monk wearing long and white hair and beard, with such a skinny body than, when walking, he seemed to float above the ground.

⁷³ Lat.: “He doesn't need anything, that one who doesn't want something.”

That monk might have heard their intention to leave, and he wanted to offer them something interesting to see.

"I wonder where that monk appeared from?!... I didn't see him coming."

"What monk?!" asked his companions.

"Let's go and see the Hermit's Cell!"

"But what's happened to you, so suddenly?! It wasn't you the one telling us that here is nothing interesting to see?!... You go, if you want. We will wait for you down here. I saw that Cell before and you better be prepared for quite a climbing up there!"

He would have renounced, but he was so intrigued by the urge of that enigmatic monk and also by the fact that his others companions suddenly they no longer were so enthusiastic...

So that he started climbing that path. Trampling on those scarlet leaves was giving him a strange sensation of safety. He felt like at home, wandering his childhood's forests, when those fabulous autumns were painting the trees' canopies with that multicolored deluge.

After a kilometer or so, on the right side of the path, he came across the small Cemetery of the Monastery. It was surrounded with apple trees, still bearing some fruits on their branches.

The sourish aroma of that juicy and crunchy apple he bit, it reinvigorated him. For a few moments he stood there and looked at those tombs. The vast majority of those tombs had small crosses made of wood, but one could no longer read the names on that crosses, because the elements washed them out.

The funeral mounds were covered in that golden layer of leaves... It was so much serenity there so, if you had enough patience, you could hear crumbles of eternity...

Going up, the path was passing by a quite deep ravine. At one moment, that path continued with a very narrow carved in stone footpath, descending beyond the edge of the precipice, and being collapsed almost on half of its width. It barely allowed you to place a foot before another, while grabbing the tree roots exposed by the bank erosion.

It was quite intriguing how that footpath, though in the beginning seemed to be descending and making you feel a little afraid, and humble, it actually was still ascending towards that rock that exited as an arm, out of the yellowish body of that mountain.

In that rock the Hermit carved a small cell, barely measuring two by two meters, having as entrance a round carved hole one could only crawling through it in order to enter inside.

In the middle of that cell, the visitors left a candle and a matchbox, for the people coming here, to light that candle up, as an offering for the peace of the Hermit's soul.

He felt the impulse of lighting that candle up and he did it. He looked outside through that small door hole and saw the precipice opening its threatening mouth right beyond that door, and, in the same time, he felt himself somehow protected by that safe place against the mouth of the world – that huge precipice - trying to swallow him whether he left that cell.

"I wonder... how could He live here, especially during the winter? Because here you have no possibility to make a fire, because you have no chimney..." he thought.

"I had a sheet of metal I was covering the entrance with, for keeping the snow outside when the blizzard was blowing. But on one winter the blizzard blew it away. I felt a little sad then, but I immediately took heed... I understood then that I became attached to a material thing... so that I never used anything to cover the entrance again..."

There was sitting, to the right, that Father who urged him to come here and see the Hermit's cell. He didn't see that Monk when he entered the Cell, probably because of the dark inside there. After he lit up that candle he could see that Monk staying on the right side of the Cell, with his face eastwards.

"But how have you reached here before me, Father?!... For I haven't meet you on the path up here?!..."

"You have maybe come on the long path. I am staying here and I know other and shorter paths to reach here..."

No one of them said any more words. That Hermit seemed to be in a deep state of meditation so he didn't want to bother him by asking more questions.

He looked outside and saw that the evening was coming. So he looked once more towards that Hermit but he didn't see him, "... maybe because of the dark" he thought.

While walking back that footpath he noticed that now he was grabbing the roots with his right hand, while trying to keep his balance with his left hand.

He hurried up downwards because he realized his companions must be quite annoyed because he was late. In that Cemetery, he came across a Nun who seemed to be praying there. He remembered he didn't ask that hermit who he was. So he thought that that Nun might know.

"Mother, can you tell me, please, what's the name of that hermit I met in that Cell?"

That Nun looked at him quite strange and even a little afraid...

"We do not have here any Monk. There was a Hermit, many years ago, living in that Cell he carved it with his own hands, but he died long time ago... This is his tomb... I've come here to pray him for help... I never met him alive..."

"But then?!... - he added. Maybe she hadn't understood my question or she makes confusion..."

His companions were already boarded the car, waiting for him. So, on his arrival, they simply turned back home.

Motto: “Ubi est vera patientia, ibi dei clementia.”⁷⁴

Octagon 4 – Sarmizegetusa

That trip started oddly. He felt like not finding his place there, as also the other travelers felt. He came rather because he felt obliged and he wanted to get rid of the insinuations coming from the people belonging to that writers group. They continuously criticized him for not taking part to their “community” and because he was “up nosed” and “keeping himself apart”.

“You do not know how to manage your writer career...” said him one of them, one holding “positions” in the literary life.

That night they drank a lot. At least him, he escaped the yard of the rationality and was running away on the field of the alcoholism which bridled him up each time he was drinking. He mixed the drinks and, as each time he did that, he felt very sick. He was ill the whole night, fighting to stop that room from spinning around, and trying to hide his groans while vomiting...

He fell asleep when the morning was almost there. He slept an agitated sleep, dreaming that he was trying to remain sober, but all kind of “friends” were coming to him and were forcing him to drink, and he kept drinking against his own will...

“My head is killing me! Each time this bus takes a curve, I spin twice... and it makes me feel nausea...”

“Take of sip of alcohol and you will feel better...”

He tried, of course. He would have done anything to get rid of that sickness. But, immediately he smelled the alcohol, his stomach rushed upwards; waves of numbness passed through his hands and cold sweats soaked hi shirt.

“We have reached our destination.”

That Stronghold looked like a peasant front yard. Here and there were foundation carved stones, and some derelict

⁷⁴ Lat.: “Where there is true patience, there is the clemency of God.”

stone walls. That tall and very raw grass invaded with savageness and moisture all the surroundings.

"This damned head ache!" he said as for himself.

"Maybe, if you chew these herbs you will feel better, like in a half of an hour..."

That man who spoke to him, he seemed to be a traveler too. His rucksack, his clothes, and his gear - everything made him look like a professional hiker. He didn't belong to their group, a fact that was obvious.

He handed him a few withered leaves, quite aromatic ones, which he got out of his little red deer leather pouch, that he was wearing hanged on that leather string he was wearing around his neck.

Quite mistrustful, he took those herbs and started chewing them. What was there to lose? Anyway, he felt so sick that he would have done everything to feel better.

He felt how, in contact with the saliva, those herbs released an astringent and minty taste, and a pleasant numbness started to engulf, in the same time, his face and his digestive tract. He didn't dare to believe that those herbs were really efficient.

"You must not resist the effect; accept the medicine and it will cure you better and quicker." - told him that man.

"Thanks!"

"We have here everything we need, but we no longer want to know about the Treasures left us by our Forefathers, the Dacians. There is not about gold, but about medicinal plants for instance, or it is about that spirituality that facilitated the Christendom to be accepted so early and so quickly and on a peaceful way. Or their respect for nature! You see, the Dacians were amongst the first ecologists of the Planet Earth!..."

That man took a few steps forwards and he turned towards the group.

"I am your guide here. Like you can see, I am a Dacian, as my tall staff with the bent and gnarly upper end, it tells about me. I am going to lead you through this immense Stronghold, which I am going to help you to see. This is because Sarmizegetusa it has over two hectares of surface, but

us, being so accustomed to the prototype of the medieval Cities, we cannot perceive its real dimensions and its contours.

That headache left him. The Guide was speaking with a smooth voice, but that voice had a tonality that was drawing their attention and, in the same time, it seemed to easily cross that distance between the Guide and the Group.

A high dignity was springing out within that man, which was given not by his stature, neither by his peculiar garment, nor by the wise way to behave. That dignity came like out of the coherence the whole his being had... His blue eyes... and then his hair grown in a mane, and then his white and long beard, if conferred him a discrete but in the same time imposing look, like the one of an ascetic, of a secret priest, officiating the Mystery of unveiling the true story of the Dacians. He behaved like he had a capital mission to accomplish: that one of conveying further the Mystery of the Dacians...

“But why are you saying that you are Dacian?”

That question came from a retired History professor, and it expressed that one's almost furious attitude when hearing about Dacians.

“Yes, I am Dacian. I deplore the mistake we are perpetuating because of the Falsified History we teach and learn, that we are the descendants of the Romans. They were a related population waging against Dacians a fratricide war; they only occupied less than fourteen percents of the Dacia's territory and pillaged everything they could... Then, when the cancer of the corruption destroyed their Empire from inside and divided their Kingdom against itself, they no longer were able to stand and they disappeared in history, leaving behind some really feeble descendants, which, by no means are we.”

“You do not know what you are talking about! How could you say something like that?!... We have all those scientifically validated arguments, all the archaeological proves, all of them!...”

That Professor seemed that he was fighting for his own survival! His struggle to defend his knowledge accumulated during so many years and with so great efforts, it was now questioned... And if what he knew it wasn't the truth, what was him? If that was the case, his entire being would lose its reason to be... Those long years of memorizing data, of memorizing

facts from the past, they represented his reason to be, his whole life... Facing that challenge he locked himself in his ivory tower and reacted furiously by fighting back...

"Let's leave our theoretical debate for later and please allow me to present you the archaeological treasures lying scattered all over this place, amongst the ruins of this Stronghold, treasures which captivated the attention and caused the admiration of the foreign historians. Only us, like hating ourselves, we left all these things to be destroyed by elements, in a state of disrepair, in nobody's care...

Lo, here, under this hundreds of years old fir tree, we have these two gearwheels carved in stone, like waiting for being combined in some mechanism...

A little further up, there we have that huge "bowl" also carved and polished in stone. That is one of the only two existing in the whole world. We have been helped by a British archeologist to understand what it really was: it was destined to be filled with clean water and then, on the mirror formed by doing that, they performed thorough studying of the stars. It is about thousands of years old astrolabe, made of such simple and available materials and it incorporated such a basic idea..."

"But what can you say about the Dacians' civilization regarding the fact that their edifices were made out of wood and they rotten away?!... There are not great monuments, or cities, or castles, or buildings remained..."

"Can't you see in this an argument for the advanced civilization they produced? Nowadays we are speaking so much about being ecologists, and we disregard the fact that the Dacians lived in such a great harmony with Gaea?!... It the world's civilization had adopted this style of living, don't you agree that we wouldn't have been selling and buying pollution like a "commodity"? The Dacians were very highly spiritualized. On the surface of this stronghold we have been able to identify twelve altars.

In the end of my intervention I would like to ask you a last question, which only apparently it has not answered yet: what do you think that around the Dacian Strongholds there haven't been found any weapons for, despite the reluctant and very limited archaeological diggings performed?"

“Maybe they surrendered and all their weapons were collected and taken away by their conquerors.”

“My answer to that question, that one that makes my soul feel serene, it is that here took place no battle at all. Actually, I think the wars from 101-102 and from 105-106, they were waged only by a small part of the Dacians. Saint Apostle Andrew Christianized these territories in the year 45 AD, and the Gospel of Christ spread here like a wildfire, because the Dacians were already monotheistic and the moral principles put in place by Zamolxis had already prepared the terrain. It seems the Dacians observed the commands: “You shall not kill!” and “Love even your enemy!”, and they did it in the only possible: literally. Paradoxically – but didn’t say Father Nicolae Dela Rohia that Christendom it means paradox – this was the way we, the Dacians survived... by withdrawing from before our enemies where they couldn’t reach...”

The History professor went a further away, having a look one could read hatred, but also some fear, in it...

It was already dusk upon Sarmizegetusa, and a defending shadow, as a silky veil of loneliness, it was protectively covering the Stronghold.

“You didn’t contest my affirmations. You seemed to be interested in the aspects I presented...”

He felt he knew that man, that Dacian, from ever.

“Actually, I agree what you said. But I haven’t felt myself Dacian until today. But, yes, after hearing your arguments, I felt differently... the Dacians seemed to me as a closed chapter somewhere in a far gone history, and now they seem to be living secretly within us... In fact, the Dacians are us... I want to tell you something, and I ask you apologize before hearing it, because it is a little odd: I feel like I know you from ever... from the beginning of the time...”

“Can you postpone the turning back to the Hotel, until tomorrow at noon? You might have the chance to witness a very special Mystery...”

“Of course I can. This trip was so boring after all. Except drinking, there was nothing “interesting” in it.”

After he announced the group he was meeting them the next day at noon, he left together with the Guide, but not

before hearing what the History professor said: "You might be caught and eaten by the Dacian Wolf..."

They left on foot. The path was ascending through the Dacian altars, ever higher, and then it went around the mountain's top, to the right, unexpectedly arriving in a glade, like crossing through a time and space portal to a parallel universe. That glade, after descending for a while, it started going even higher.

He couldn't see the end of that glade, because that night was so dark. There was no moon. It was so dark that you could poke yourself, in your eye, with your own finger, without seeing it.

They were advancing rather feeling the ground with their feet, going towards that light that seemed not to be so far from them, but they reached their destination after around two and a half hours. A shepherd dog started barking at them but, after a while, perhaps because he felt the known smell of the Guide, that dog ceased barking.

"My Father left that candle in the window for he knew I was coming this night and he saw the dark night outside. He moved here, in this glade, in the house he inherited from his parents, a house a couple of hundreds of years old, built up by his ancestors. He lives here in total silence. Please do not get upset because he will seem not to notice you and he won't answer any of your words. He will seem to totally ignore your presence. Sometimes I have the impression he lives in another dimension, in a parallel universe..."

They entered the house and took seats at that table, on which there were two bowls with fresh milk and on a plate there was a still warm polenta. The fir wooden spoons were placed on some hemp little towels.

"Welcome to our house! - told him the Guide. Enjoy your meal! I will pray a little before eating, I hope you wouldn't mind. I do not know if you are religious or not. And after that I will bless the food and I will portion the polenta..."

In that deep silence of the night he heard only the neigh of that mare that the old man was using for surviving that wilderness, carrying with it firewood or the things - otherwise very few - necessary to his living.

The old man was sitting on an old wooden bench, like he was a statue. One couldn't say if he had his eyes open or close.

Both the table and the stools have tree legs each. The wooden plate the polenta was placed on, it had an octagonal shape.

"Let's eat!"

The sweetness and the silkiness of the milk fitted perfectly the roughness of the polenta.

"We usually eat simple food. Do you like it?"

"When I was a child, my Grandma used to give us, her grandchildren this same food like this. During the summer nights we consider it as a delicacy.

Now, after work, because I have no patience at all, I throw something in me and that's my meal..."

Their dialogue ceased abruptly. A rumble like that of a storm, seemingly coming from the deep of the earth, it darkened even more that night outside, making the big dog whining and the mare neighing with fear.

The old man opened the door and let the dog in, and that one rushed, as big as it was, and hid under the old man's bench, trembling with fear.

"The nature it has started flourishing. Today I have seen, for the first time on this year, flowers of "deer's tooth" exiting their green and succulent cuticles... "The Beautiful Fairies" are going to pass by, for this is the sound announcing their arrival. Let's keep our silence until they will have passed from here, in order not to endanger ourselves. But, please, do not be scared!" – told him the Guide.

Seemingly unaffected by what was happening, the Old Man placed his hand on the dog's head and that one became appeased.

Decreasing in intensity, that rumble it allowed to be heard, from outside, from where the mare's stable was, doors and windows shutting noises and loud squeaks.

Suddenly, everything finishes as soon as it started. He checked his wristwatch and saw the time was twelve minutes past midnight.

The Old Man got out.

“If you want, please come and check the signs They have left for us...” the Guide told him.

They followed the Old Man. That one was already in front of the stable’s gate, which seemed it had been opened and closed repeatedly, without being elevated from the ground, so that the lowest wooden board scratched a semi-circle. Seen in the light of the lantern, that semicircle seemed like a coquette woman eyebrow.

Lighten by the lantern’s light, the trees nigh to the stable had, hanging on their branches, crowns woven from willow twigs, which just started budding up. In the small windows on both sides of the door there had been placed the same type of crowns...

Getting closer to the mare which was munching its hay, the Old Man slowly raised the long hairs the mare’s mane had. In the poor light they saw something seemingly impossible: the hairs under had been woven in dozens of knots... He rapidly counted those knots up and the number was thirty three...

He felt his skin getting goose bumps. The whole happening was so mysterious than an inexplicable fear was sneaking into his soul.

“This is what you wanted me to see, when you invited me to come and visit your place?”

“Yes. Because I intuited you are not spiritually blind as the others are. But please do not try to rationally explain the things you have just lived. The knowledge is of many types: the rational one is followed by the imaginative one and that one is followed by the intuitive one and, may God allow you to see that, all of those are crowned by the gift of the conscious nescience in the unapproachable light...”

“Please tell me, though, as much as it is possible, what was all about!”

“We are in the glade on top of which there is the “tree from the middle of the three water springs”. It is the holy tree of the Dacians, called The Great Ash Tree. This place now we are standing on, it is called “Under Crowns”. Without these Water Springs the life here would be impossible. The creek flowing at some three hundred meters from here is called from immemorial times: Sargetia.

But let's come back to "The Beautiful Fairies". The people also call them as: the "Decebalus's Priestesses", but I don't agree that. Decebalus, as I already told you, he was a Christian. What they truly are, it cannot be known as we have been thought in school as: "rational" or "scientific"...

But I can tell you the stories I heard while being a child and I was coming with my father to spend my summer vacations here. The locals told me that "The Beautiful Fairies" are virgins inhabiting the upper caves of these mountains, and they visit the pristine realms once inhabited by Dacians, at the first signs of the Springtime. The "Deer Tooth" is the flower usually announcing their arrival. They are dressed up in black garments, they whistle, they sing, and they weave crowns of willow young twigs, as you can see the ones from here. They throw those crowns on the isolated houses. That's why also this place is called "Under Crowns", for on each year it is flooded with a deluge of crowns.

These virgins weave the mare's mane, but nobody understands how it is possible in that short time they passing takes it, to elaborate such intricate weavings. I like to think they are shaping the material reality or the temporal reality..."

That night he couldn't sleep at all. By experiencing that Mystery, that storm of unreal overwhelming the real, it weakened the hinges he thought before his soul had them so strong.

On the next morning the Guide descended with him until they reach in a place they could see the city from. It seemed the descent took no longer than an hour. There could be two possibilities: the Guide could bend the time-space continuum, or that whole hidden realm was close to the city but still nobody knew how to reach it.

"In order to reach the Hotel you take this path to the right. But, before you leave, for I feel we will never meet again, I want to give you a thinking theme. The name of Jesus starts with the number ten, like does the name of Decebalus, and like does the name of Deceneu. I think the Dacians adopted names starting with the figure ten just because that was to them like a baptism: a beginning of μετάνοια⁷⁵. Do you know that the

⁷⁵ Greek: metanoia. A spiritual conversion. A transformative change of the heart.

Baptism by sinking somebody into the water, it is considered by Orthodox Christians like a Second Deluge, a personal Deluge?”

Motto: “Natura semper sibi consonant.”⁷⁶

Deluge 3 – Unconscious Alcoholism

He started to associate every activity with the alcohol. He went out to take a walk with his little Son, he drank alcohol. He had some physical labor to do: consuming alcohol was a part of that labor. He read something: he always had next to him the bottle of alcohol. He had some spare time: he occupied it by consuming alcohol. He participated to a cultural event: he left from there for a pub. He went out in the nature: he enjoyed that by having his head soaked with alcohol...

This association between everything he did and the ingestion of the alcohol it ended to be his second nature.

Sometimes, during the rare moments of self awareness he had, he recalled the people he considered before as deserving his contempt: the alcoholics... he didn't understood back there what those people were consuming alcohol for... or what they were consuming in such a quantity that it affected they capacity of keeping it under control... What hidden mechanism was bringing the ugly state they were in?!...

And later he realized the fact that he reached to be like them. Somehow, in an odd manner, he was proud of himself of being able to ingest so huge quantities of diverse alcoholic beverages...

Concomitantly to the increase of the quantities there were increasing the sums of money he spent on alcohol. And the period he was helpless because of his drunkenness increased too.

During vacations he ended to get drunk and awake from drunkenness a few times a day, and each night he went to bed soaked with alcohol. The next early morning he was already drunk too.

He started hating the people telling him he was doing wrong. They bothered him!... It wasn't their business what he was spending his money for!...

⁷⁶ Lat.: “The nature is always consonant to itself.”

He ended to quarrel with his wife on that matter. His kids watched terrified how he was vomiting, or being sick, or having nervous breakdowns.

He was hiding the alcohol because his kids, when finding his bottles with alcohol, they hid those bottles or they emptied the content in the sink.

“This is the last day I am buying alcohol! Starting with Tomorrow, I will give up alcohol!...” was him trying to deceive his own conscience that was accusing him and making him feel guilty...

“This expensive bottle of alcohol is going to be the last one I am emptying it!...”

A colleague of his told him on one occasion that: “How somebody lies to himself, nobody can lie to him!”

Sometimes, in the days before his monthly salary, he spent the last money his family had. If there emerged a medical emergency, he had no money to pay for it.

He succeeded in shaping this kind of hidden alcoholism, because he wasn't drinking at work. And at home he ceased getting drunk, but he was still consuming huge quantities of alcohol after work, so that his body, constantly abused, got some sort of endurance and it rarely reached crises.

But still happened to him, from time to time, to “get at large” when participating some celebration, a factor accelerating the quantity per times alcohol ratio, so that he ended going at home by leaning himself on walls and fences, terrified of thinking at the sufferance following to torment him the whole following night, the next morning, and sometimes even the next day until evening.

Over years, his endurance to alcohol started decreasing. Memory losses became more frequent. He remembered nothing he was doing while he was under the influence of the alcohol. And this started scaring him, because of the consequences it could had.

And yes, he drove while being drunk! “There is a short distance to my place... I am going to take the secondary streets... what could happen? Tomorrow I need the car to go to work!...”

Previously, before being so dominated by alcoholism, he always condemned the people getting behind the driving wheel

in state of drunkenness, or even after consuming a small quantity of alcohol. But in the state he reached, he was doing just what he condemned so strongly before.

While feeling awfully sick he was praying to Lord Jesus and to His Mother, to help him escape that state. Sometimes he felt he was about to die, because that sickness brought him on the verge of the collapse. But his very strong constitution, that one of a former sportsman, it defended him until then against having a grave liver illness or a heart attack or a stroke...

Those desperate prayers were the only support he was able to lean on, because nothing else or nobody else could help him in any way.

He was terrified, he felt himself totally deserted, lonely in his sufferance. He thought that maybe that was the way the moribund feel before passing away... Maybe this is the way the people suffering of incurable illnesses feel, while seeing the hour of their death coming closer to them...

"Forgive me, Holy Mother of the Lord Jesus, for I am an alcoholic! I never kept the promise I made to You when my daughter was so ill and in danger to die. You healed her, but I continued to drink..."

"I wonder if this alcoholism of mine it is the consequence of a curse... This illness that I have, will it be towards my salvation or towards my demise?... Will I escape it, or will I die with it?..."

Motto: “Nil lumen si deficit umbra.”⁷⁷

Prodigal Son 2 – Ascetic Philokalia

He received that first volume of The Romanian Philokalia from the one who later became Father Mihai. That one even wrote him a dedication: “In the memory of the days we spent together in the Monastic Cell!”

He never opened that book since then, but he read in the Foreword to Paterikon, that reading The Philokalia is like climbing on very high mountains, and those words intrigued him very much, and they remained inside him to leaven the dough of his soul and mind, until, on unknown ways, he felt that urge to read that book.

He opened the book randomly at Evagrius Pontius, in the introduction of whom, Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae wrote the followings:

“The virtues, which are steps of the active life, they come in the following order: The lowest one is the faith, which gives birth to the fear of God. The fear of God gives birth to the keeping of the commandments, whose daughters are: the restraint, the sapience, the patience, and the hope. All of those lead to dispassion, and the dispassion’s fruit is the love. From now on we will leave the active life. The love introduces us in the contemplative life.

The lowest state of the contemplative life is the “natural gnosis”. To this it follows the “theology”, the higher gnosis, and the contemplation of the Holy Trinity which is also the stage of the “clean prayer”.

He remembered Father Mihai and a great feeling of love engulfed him. He felt that, even beyond death, Father Mihai was mediating for him. The proof for that it was that book and the fact that him, though being such a sinner, he could receive, at least partially, the things he was reading about...

⁷⁷ Lat.: The light won’t mean anything, if there is no shadow.”

Motto: “Magna servitus est magna fortuna.”⁷⁸

Ark 8 – Spiritual Guide

That fasting period was about to end, and the Abbot was urging the monks to pray with more intensity, with more self-giving, in order to wake them up from somnolence and tiredness caused by the long periods of taking vigil and of fasting and of lack of sleeping.

He left the two priests from Altar to continue celebrating the Holy Liturgy and he came in the back part of the Church where a wooden retractable wall was used to create a separation between the people attending the religious service and the ones to whom the Spiritual Guide was receiving their Confessions.

Believers who prepared themselves at least during the previous week or at minimum for three days - by fasting and praying, they were downloading the burdens of their sins and then they passed in the other space of the Church, keeping in hand a candle, and waiting for the Holy Liturgy to come to an end, in order to receive the Holy Impartation in front of the Altar.

He, the Young Colonel, he was a little late, because he didn't know the rules, so that he was the last one to confess. He was quite emotional because he never confessed his sins before a Spiritual Guide.

After he kneeled down, he uttered hastily his sins, like he learnt about, on the previous day, from a brochure dedicated to that. The Spiritual Guide listened to his Confession and then uttered the forgiveness prayers; but he felt that the Penitent had something more to say and asked him:

“Do you have something to ask me?”

“Father, the sin of not fulfilling the promised I made, I have committed it against a promise I've made to the Mother of the Lord Whom I prayed and I said that, if She heals my

⁷⁸ Lat.: “A great destiny is a great servitude.”

daughter, who was gravely ill in the hospital, I won't ever drink alcohol. I do not know what I promised that for... I wasn't at that time a heavy drinker. My quite odd alcoholism started after I made that promise... I started drinking daily... I tried to find out what is the matter with me... I read everything I could in the Christian Orthodox writings... My addiction grows stronger on each day..."

"Have you been fasting during the last three days?"

"Yes I have... as by a miracle; I was able to abstain from alcohol... Sometimes I feel like I have to take a baton and beat myself, as Saint Niphon did!..."

"You don't need to do that! You need to beat yourself by using your Will..."

"But how can I avoid this will of mine to be "mine", namely to avoid it coming out of my vain glory?"

The eyes of the Spiritual Father shined with joy. So, this servant of God, confessing his sins, he was not hopelessly lost for salvation. Though he was overwhelmed with sins, the Good Lord still didn't let him without any help; he gave him a little Understanding.

He, the Young Colonel, he felt that he was fighting this war together with this "General", who was guiding him and helping him to achieve the combat's objectives.

"I am asking this because I leant that I have to renounce to my will and I fell into not having any will to fight alcoholism. And through this window I have opened unknowingly, the sin of the alcoholism rushed in."

"Say, when you want to do something that requires your will: "I can do everything with the help of my Lord and God Jesus Christ!"

"Father, please give me a canon!..."

"For now, this is enough... If you can, do good things, give some alms..."

Today you can't be Imparted but, if you can, keep fasting the next week and, after you will confess again on the next Sunday, we will see then..."

Going out the Church he felt himself like floating above the ground. He was smiling continuously and feeling light like a feather. He was so ashamed of confessing some of his big sins but, despite of that, he did it.

Even though he spoke in front of the Spiritual Guide, that one seemed not to be present like a “person”... Usually, when we are in front of a strong personality we try to hide our mistakes... But the Father received the gift of listening to the confession somehow in an “impersonal way”, but still remaining in communion with the confessing ones. His longsuffering and clean spirit was a healer and his words were a medicine for the painful souls.

While confessing your sins in front of the Father, you felt you were in the presence of God, Whom you were actually confessing your sins, and Who was the One giving you the appropriate medicine and appeasement.

With that angelic gentleness, behold the Father lifted him up from the state of separation from the Church, in the state of the Communion, and he saved this previously lost sheep, showing him the way back at home.

Just before leaving, the Spiritual Guide gave him a last advice, saying him:

“Every good thing must be done with blessing and advice. Walking alone the life’s path it drives people to great dangers... even they think they are doing good things...”

Motto: “Magnis telis magna portenta feriuntur.”⁷⁹

Awakening 7 – I Cannot Do Anything...

That period was a continuous misfortune. Everything was breaking down in the house. He also received that warning from the City Hall for he forgot paying his taxes, and there was another week until the salary... he was mad with fury...

Driving quite brutally, he “managed” to slightly hit a car from behind. That car sustained no damages at all, but his car had its radiator cracked open.

The driver of the car from the front, he suddenly braked, even though there it was forbidden to stop, because it was too near to that crossroads. After the collision, that driver got out of his car and started yelling at him and accusing him of being inattentive...

“Yes, I am guilty! I’m so sorry!...”

Like by a charm, the other driver calmed down almost instantly. In the same time it seemed that, despite that bad luck, between them two there was a feeling of communion.

“Would you want to tow your car to a repair shop?” that one asked him.

“No, thanks! I’m fine! But, if you want, please move your car so that I could park over there and assess the damages...”

He remained there, in his car, analyzing the situation he was in: he had car broken, he had no money, the insulation of the apartment was leaking badly, he had just caught a cold, his daughter dropped the laptop and broke its screen, he had no money for preparing for the winter, at work there were circulating rumors about personnel cutbacks... and his spine was hurting him more than ever!...

He felt the urge of accusing somebody, anybody, for all of those...

“But what if the culpable is myself?!... Can I admit that and, consequently, would I be able to change my own behavior and my way of relating to the material things?!...”

⁷⁹ Lat.: “The great monsters must be hit with big lances.”

I wonder, where must I start from... how could I realized that I am the one to blame? I maybe have to start with calming myself down... and then to try applying, at least to this simple and without consequences happening, the stages of the forgiveness I learnt by reading Father Nicolae Dela Rohia's books.

Let's see: I forgive myself for being inattentive and I forgive the driver whom I did wrong, by crushing into his car! And I forgive myself because I have forgiven that guy!..."

He felt himself relaxing.

"Actually, it seems true the fact that the psychic reactions to stimuli are learnt and not innate! But then, could we answer bad things by doing good things?!..."

It came in his mind the thought that he must give thanks to god for this accident, because it might stopped him before committing a worse one – he was really driving foolishly before that accident!... And then nobody would have been there to repair the laptop, to pay the taxes, to fix that roof's insulation...

He locked the car and headed towards the taxi station nearby, while admitting it:

"By myself, I really can't do anything!..."

Motto: “Pacem accipere.”⁸⁰

Sign 6 – Is Going To Be A Boy!...

“You should have done, maybe, an abortion... We cannot afford to raise a second child. These capitalist conditions we are building up with communist methods, you will lose your job. In addition to that, how are you going to graduate the university?!...”

He was worried because of the reduced material possibilities they had. Lately, the Government kept complaining that the budget has no money. The past month they received their salary in two tranches, namely they were stolen almost half of their incoming, because of receiving that half the next month, and that continues repeated ever since...

The rumors were that the “compensation for food”, actually a big chunk of their salaries, it was to be cut off for good.

Within the Army, the militaries were constantly menaced with the fact that they could in any moment be fired if they do not comply with the existent conditions. There was that trendy chorus: “If you don’t like it, you could always resign!”

So, momentarily, the solution of the abortion seemed to be the most at hand one. It wasn’t too costly and it was in trend. The private practices grew everywhere and the gynecologists were making a lot of money.

His wife didn’t agree to make that abortion. She wanted to have more children...

“But bringing children in this harsh world and then letting them strive in needs because you aren’t able to provide them the necessary means...”

That night his sleeping was quite agitated. He woke up, he prepared to go to his job when, he felt it like a shock in his head... he clearly heard that voice above any voice, saying: “Is going to be a boy!”

⁸⁰ Lat.: “Receiving the peace.”

Since that instant he renounced to any resistance. Yes, he was to have a boy. That one's existence was already decided from above.

Motto: "Vacuum in natura non datur."⁸¹

Octagon 5 – Mountain Peak

"Yes, I have been pursued by the Communist Regime's men, by the Political Police. They wanted to catch me but they weren't able by any means. Sometimes I descended the mountain to the outskirts of the City. On those times of deep poverty, while the people had nothing to eat, I managed to find some food by searching the garbage bins...

Although I was tonsured in monasticism, I wasn't wearing the monastic garment, but some rags which were showing me as a poor man, both materially and, to say so, mentally.

Once I came across with two of the people searching for me. They asked me who I am and where I was going to. I was turning back with the garbage "I bought" from the bins from around. I had on my shoulder a sack with a few pieces of dry bread and some old and wrinkled potatoes. I answered them that my old woman sent me to the market and I, being such a weak old man, I didn't dare to refuse her...

They laughed at me and at my story and let me go in peace, by not seeing who I actually was... God and the Mother of the Lord concealed me from them!...

I was constantly uttering this prayer: "Lord, turn back to the kindness of the prayer, all my enemies!"

Those times of persecution are now past, and I have remained here in this wilderness of the mountain, which is so dear to me. I have here all the things I need, especially the quietude...

One morning I woke up and I discovered that I was almost completely paralyzed on the right side of my body. I was able only to move my hand, but with great difficulty. I was engulfed by the dread of the death and knowing that I didn't do anything good in my life, I started praying, I confessed my sins,

⁸¹ Lat.: "There is no emptiness in nature."

and then I imparted myself, in the best way I could, with the Holy Mysteries.

After a little while, I fell asleep, or I fainted... In my dream appeared the Mother of the Lord and commanded me to build up a hermitage, here on the mountain. Although I felt a great peace and an untold love, I started crying and saying that I was paralyzed: how could I fulfill the things She was commanding me?!...

When I woke up, the things were worse than at the beginning. I barely was able to crawl from here to there. But I strained my will to obey the commandment I received. So that, each day, thinking at the logs I had to hew down, to haul them, to lift them, and to place them in the hermitage's building, I forced myself to walk and, slowly, my palsy started to give up. I don't remember how long it took me to completely recover. And behold, around us, there is a hermitage around us...

Praise the Lord Jesus Christ and the Mother of the Lord!"

"Father, I've read about the anchorites living on the top of the Mount Athos. Are there living, in our mountains, such ascetics?"

"Yes, there are! But, as you might know, they are searching for quietude. Sometimes, on the Great Holidays, they come to confess and to be imparted, and they participate to the Holy Liturgy, but still in the hidden. Others only stay at a distance from the Church's building, in order not to be seen by people. They participate spiritually to the religious service.

They cannot be seen, unless themselves, for some blessed reason, they want to show themselves to the people.

Rarely, they appear like some ragged and depraved beggars and they probe the faith of the people coming here, by asking them something to eat...

If you want to see a hermit's cell in a cave nearby, nobody knows if it is any longer inhabited or not, go upwards through the water of this creek – because there is no other way to reach there. At one point, you will come across a fir tree with its trunk cut off in half by a lightning, the cut off piece and the still standing trunk forming a Cross. Go to the right and squeeze yourself between those two rocks imagining a gate, beyond which you will find that hermit's cell.

But if there is somebody, please to not talk to him, because they will leave...”

He left for that cave Father Abbot described it. He climbed that creek through that cold water and, each time he drank from that water, he felt himself reinvigorated and, in a way, lighter... and happier...

He reached his destination after a long and tiresome ascension. The opening between the two described rocks was very narrow. He was forced to leave his rucksack, which contained everything he need for surviving, outside that Gate.

“Even if somebody comes and steals it, I won’t die because of fasting for one day... And I have seen that the forest is full with blackberries around here...”

After he squeezed himself, with difficulty, through that gate – in the beginning he almost renounced to it, because it seemed impossible to him – he discovered beyond it a quite large place; his sensation was that of being in another world, in a parallel universe. It was so peaceful in there, like even the birds’ songs were ashamed to enter and disturb the peace from there.

He was amazed by the fact that the afternoon sun still penetrated inside and it was pleasantly warming that place up.

He approached that cave with shy, trying to see if there was anybody inside, and he discerned there a silhouette standing close to the entrance, in order to benefit of the sunlight for reading that prayer book he held in his hands. That man was reading silently, only moving his lips, but not uttering the prayers’ word with a loud voice.

He, the Visitor, he didn’t understand why he felt such a humbleness and why he lowered his sight and kept his silence in order not to disturb that praying man. He wanted so much to speak to that man, but, accordingly to the advice that Father Abbot gave him, he did not say anything. But he couldn’t bear to leave, so he remained there, not knowing why... maybe waiting for that man to finish his prayer.

Somehow, he felt that his heart was feeling the hermit’s prayers, not as words, but as peace and as comfort and as joy and as spiritual love... It seemed that he also belonged there and there it was his house too; there was the place he left, in

times immemorial, and he wandered ever since, by not finding the way back to Paradise, until, behold, he finally found it!...

He felt the need to pray himself, a thing he wasn't too familiar with; even if he prayed before, that "activity" it was an "administrative" thing, related to having "good relations" with God...

He recalled that prayer that Father Abbot told him he was uttering in order to escape his enemies. And he started repeating it, paying attention to the words he was uttering in his mind, words which were gaining increasingly more sense, and then they seemed to dissolve themselves in some kind of breathing, in some sort of all-comprising serenity given by a sentiment of love and forgiveness. He started crying silently. Big tears were flowing down on his cheeks. He felt so sorry for the time he lost by chasing unimportant and worldly things!...

After a while that crying stopped and it left behind, in his soul, a feeling of cleanness, of appeased joyfulness, of spiritual freshness.

The Hermit finished his prayer canon and came outside bringing with him a small bowl, carved in wood, with raspberries. It was probably his food for the entire day... He poured those raspberries in the palm of the Visitor, who started eating them with joy, with thankfulness, and with humbleness, as he would have been Imparted after the Celebration of the Natural Gnosis ended.

The Hermit was watching him with much understanding, and him, the Visitor, he felt that there was about a forgiveness of the sins, which were burnt up and abolished by the clean spiritual love of that Hermit.

His soul was, for many days after, engulfed by that peace he felt, and all the things seemed now bearing some simple rationalities, all of them pointing towards God.

Motto: “Naturae non imperatur nisi parendo.”⁸²

Deluge 4 – Conscious Alcoholism: The Hope

He started to feel increasingly ashamed by his alcoholism!

He was analyzing himself, he was watching the way he was behaving when he was drunk. He was becoming increasingly aware of the reactions his family had and aware of the way the people around him considered him.

Unlike the majority of the alcoholics, who lose weight and become walking skeletons, because he was eating so much after drinking, he started to put on weight.

“I have now the ideal weight the pigs are sacrificed and processed at!”

His shame about his alcoholism begun when, one evening, he sent his boy to buy him a bottle of wine, because he was so drunk that he couldn’t go. It was already dark outside. Until the child came back, he had remorse.

“What if something happens to him? Have I really reached that state that nothing matters to me except having alcohol to drink?!... I am a stupid idiot! Now I endangered my family too?!... Isn’t it enough that I am wasting the family’s resources?!...”

He often saw small children sent to buy a pack of cigarettes or a bottle of alcohol, or both – and nothing for themselves. He felt such great pity when seeing such things. Sometimes those children had enough money, and some other times they haven’t, so the vendor noted in a notebook the “debt” the “loyal customers” accumulated.

“I wonder if my children will end to be like those unfortunates...” he thought, and his soul was feeling so much pain when seeing his son arriving back home, barely being able to carry that bag with that bottle of wine...

In those moments he hated himself with the whole his heart.

⁸² Lat.: “We cannot dominate the nature, except by obeying it.”

“I am no better than the people I was judging before with such superiority, whom I considered as inferior to me... Maybe this is the punishment I received for I judged them: to experience their sufferance, their physical and mental torment.

Thank You Lord for I don't like drinking! I don't like the taste; I don't like the effect it has upon me... I think if I felt good for a single moment after drinking, I would be condemned forever! But, even so, how could I escape this, Lord?

I know that it only takes will... But how could I want to will?!... Because it seems I don't want to!...”

The days were passing in the same way, between drunkenness and recovery; only the shame he felt was constantly increasing... God – even though he knew He existed – it seemed to be a Character living somewhere far away, and not in the unmediated reality.

Motto: “Saepe magna virtus in pusillo corpore est.”⁸³

Prodigal Son 3 – Because of My Sins...

“The law of the freedom teaches the whole truth. Many people know this out of knowledge; but only few people understand this, for the understanding always is in proportion with fulfilling the law’s commandments.”⁸⁴

⁸³ Lat.: “Sometimes, a great virtue dwells in a worthless body.”

⁸⁴ Stăniloae, Priest Professor PhD Academician Dumitru, *The Romanian Philokalia*, volume I, Harisma Publishing House: Craiova, 1992, Mark the Ascetic, *About the Spiritual Law in Two Hundreds Heads*, Head no. 30.

Motto: “Maeror mentes abicit.”⁸⁵

Awakening 8 – An Orphan

The road to the cemetery was quite difficult. That torrid summer day was making everybody to sweat.

The funeral procession was accompanying his mother to her resting place.

He tried to be strong, not to cry. But when the Priest looked him deep in his eyes and uttered those words: “She asks for forgiveness from her son!...”, he burst in crying, choking himself with his own tears.

Walking behind that hearse, he got appeased a little. While walking, he was watching the traces the hearse’s wheels were cutting in the thick yellow dust, made of thinly crumbled clay... Those tiny silicon beads were shining in the sunlight like diamonds.

People come and go, but nature is always there, a silent witness of human life’s futility.

The horses were stepping heavily, striving to climb that steep slope to the cemetery. At one point, due to the tall and thick grass, the hoarse started sliding to the right. The people around there, they started pushing upslope that hoarse, because the horses couldn’t have done it by themselves.

Once they reached the freshly dug tomb, the Priest did the burial religious service and, after the coffin was covered with that black soil, he sealed the tomb.

The present people headed towards the place where the relatives of the deceased were sharing some brandy, some wine, and some buns.

He remained alone in front of the fresh tomb. It seemed so unreal to him. His psychic refused to understand what just happened, namely that his Mother just died and he was no longer seeing her in this world.

Close to there it was the tomb of the “Unknown Hero”, a military who died in the Second World War in unknown

⁸⁵ Lat.: “The sadness discourages the souls.”

circumstances, and who was found by the locals and buried, not having any name wrote on his cross because they couldn't identify him. While living, the Mother took care of that tomb, because that dead Young Man was like an orphan, having nobody to take care of his tomb. Sometimes even him, being a young child, he was asked by his Mother to plant some flowers or to water the flowers they planted before on that tomb.

He watched around and saw there the tomb of his Father, the tomb of his Grandpa, of his Uncle, of the other Grandparents and Great Grandparents... and he felt himself so lonely... so deserted... and he felt himself like he was a step closer to death...

A thought came into his mind and he closed his eyes in order to better contemplate it:

“I am an Orphan now!”

Motto: “Quid mutationes periculo exceptum?”⁸⁶

Sign 7 – Father Confessor’s Showing Up

His Father Confessor had a heart attack and was submitted to a surgical intervention. Consequently, he wasn’t feeling so well and he couldn’t receive believers to Confession.

He developed, over years, a special filial love for his Father Confessor. Each time he confessed and he was imparted by that One, he felt like he started a new life. He was born again. He felt relieved and he regained the courage of living. He felt himself reassured.

He found out about the state the Father Confessor was in on that occasion when he asked if the Father was receiving believers to Confession, and he was told that that One was replaced by another Priest... After that Priest took his Confession, he asked him:

“How could I pray for Father Confessor?”

“Pray God to give him health, because now he is in quite bad a condition...”

He felt again like the child who lost his mother. If he lost his Father Confessor, what would be with him? How could he find the power to get over that loss?

He was the whole his life, more or less an Orphan. The Father Confessor was to him the filling up of that part of his soul which had never functioned correctly, if ever: the filial love for a Father. And there was something more: while being in the presence of the Father Confessor he felt so safe! If that One was to leave him, his struggle against his own self couldn’t stand a chance...

During the next weeks and months he daily prayer, the best he knew, for his Father Confessor. He knew those days what the one praying for one’s suffering Father it feels like.

One day he couldn’t take it anymore and went again to that Monastery, with the hope that he was somehow be able to see Father Confessor.

⁸⁶ Lat.: “Who is spared by the danger of changing?”

Reached there, he waited in the Monastery's courtyard, not knowing what else to do, and he prayed God. While he was staying there, having tears in his eyes, behold Father Confessor opened the door of his monastic cell and looked at him from far...

No one of them needed to get closer. He joyfully felt that Father Confessor knew about his prayers and, despite not feeling so well, he showed up himself, in order to reassure him.

Father Confessor stood there only for a few seconds, and then entered back. But it was enough to make his spiritual son floating with joyfulness. Behold, Father Confessor had a superior godlike ability to know the thoughts of the people...

Motto: “Medicina vici fata non possunt.”⁸⁷

Octagon 6 – Hermitage

His friend, Father Mihai died, and that affected him profoundly. That event left in his heart a wound he didn't want to let it heal! But, with the passing of time, that pain, even not disappearing, it started being of a different nature...

While they were enthusiastically talking about how to prepare their retirement – though they had almost two decades until then -, an idea was to leave their worldly lives and to build a hermitage somewhere in the mountain forests, where the unseen monastic cells of the anchorites are thought to be. That hermitage was to observe the strict rules from Mount Athos...

After Father Mihai passed away, it seems that he was protecting him from above.

“I know he prayed for me in order to get rid of the alcohol addiction! There was no way I could escape it by myself! That was a life and death struggle!”

Before Father Mihai died, he rarely phoned him and they even rarely met each other. But remained alone in this world, he was praying daily for Father Mihai's soul, though he was convinced that that one was called to God so early because he reached the salvation. And he was dwelling in the tents full of beauty, of the righteous.

And from heavens Father Mihai was praying before God, for him who remained here in the world, because he had so much more to struggle!

It seemed that finally they were together, not separated by the material world. Even though, according to the human rationality that cancer Father Mihai died of, it seemed it separated them forever, Father Mihai was more present than ever!...

He remembered how Father Mihai called him in that “monastic cell” where they were praying together, using the

⁸⁷ Lat.: “No medicine can defeat the fate.”

word "Father"; back then he didn't know the depth of Father Mihai's humbleness.

So that even though he remained alone, while reaching the final verses of the Lord's Prayer, he stopped and let Father Mihai uttering them, from heavens...

"Don't we build that hermitage on this way?!... not in a material manner, but spiritually... Father Mihai, from above there, he watches me, we pray together, and Father Mihai is, in this spiritual hermitage, my Abbot!"

Motto: “Multido canum mors est leporum.”⁸⁸

Deluge 5 – “Cranes” Robberies

“Do not touch them by any means, if you catch them in the courtyard, or in the house! In such a case you will be prosecuted. And take care who you allow to stay here, in this house, for you might be unable to later evict them. And you see, we cannot guard this entire area in order to prevent any other event like this. We cannot guard you personally. Actually, we quite rarely patrol this area... But, why must you buy right this house here?!...” was him told by that policemen who arrived to the “crime scene”. If the Police couldn’t do anything to protect him, then who could? He felt like a civilian, in a war, in an area conquered by enemies...

“You have been in the way of bigger interests!” said him that friend from the Police, without saying anything else.

He wanted to pass over those events, by considering them as something fulfilled by the implacable hand of the destiny which works in the guts of an ill society, a corrupt one, sometimes even through the ones who should be the defenders of the law. If the Police plots together with the mobsters, against the simple citizen, how will that citizen able to resist them?!...

Thos days it seemed that whole world was sinking... He saw he had no chance to escape the trap he himself got in... He engaged the entire financial capacity of his family when buying that house, because he contracted a loan from a bank. That house seemed to be an extraordinary opportunity, because of the utilities close to it, because of the size, because of the position... But he had to think twice when seeing that small price!...

He tried to find more details from some neighbors, but they lied to him and said him there was no problem at all.

“We hoped that your arrival here in this neighborhood would bring more order and we, the honest citizens will have

⁸⁸ Lat.: “The multitude of dogs it means death to hares.”

more chances against these thieves..." said him later a neighbor, after the thefts started...

After he bought that house, he started frantically spending money with the intention to make that house inhabitable. He fought the bureaucracy, the corruption, the obtuseness of the clerks... Some of them, initially, they refused even to extend the water pipe with two meters and told him he cannot have running water in that house... and such an answer was given in the third millennium and in the twenty first century, and in a Country claiming about itself of being civilized, and actually in the middle of the City!...

But he didn't have any means to fight what was repeatedly happening back then... The people having their duty in defending him, they betrayed him...

He ended sleeping no more than one hour a night. That dread of losing everything, it was accompanied by so many sorrows... he could have had a serene life, without this complication he found no explanation what he involved himself in...

He accommodated himself on the couch from the kitchen, the place he was living his nocturnal inferno. During the day the torment was fading because he was occupied at work. But during the night nothing stood between him and the sight of his possible bankruptcy.

In the beginning he mentally plotted revenge plans. He imagined solutions for defending himself. It was in vain, because nothing stopped those thieves to weekly plunder the house, by breaking through the gate and through the door. They empties the house of all valuable objects, namely tools used for repairs, but they didn't touch the car wheels maybe because they knew that in case a reclamation had been pressed on car theft, that Police department would have done their work and they would have caught them. But the Policemen from house thefts behold, they were menacing him, actually, trying to discourage him in keeping that house...

The "Cranes" kept hitting him with their merciless beaks, and escape was nowhere to be seen...

And him, left alone, fighting his alcoholism, fighting that despair caused him by the losses and by the helplessness to

defend himself, he started praying... for the ones who were inflicting him so much sufferance!

His prayer was constantly stolen and banished away, and choked by revenge thoughts. And then it came back, and he prayed desperately. He sometimes was crying when praying during night. He almost reached to pray the whole night, in a state of vigil alternated by short periods of napping, while he was tormented by nightmares.

While fulfilling his praying canon, he read the first verse of the Psalm 126:

“EXCEPT the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

Since then he ceased any resistance and put the house to sell. At a very good price... A multitude of buyers showed interested in, by coming to see it or by phoning him for asking details.

He decided to accept much lower offers, intending to at least recover a part of the money he paid for that house. So that, when the one who was behind the whole tenebrous affair manifested his interest in buying the house he accepted immediately that low offer...

“But, I wonder why he offered me that sum. He knew everything about the situation I am in. He is, actually, the one who organized my “eviction” from here, and he knows I have no chance to keep this house!... Is this because I prayed for him?!...

Yes, even he is under the power of the Lord!”

Motto: “Si Deus pro nobis, qui contra nos?”⁸⁹

Prodigal Son 4 – Faith

“That much truth is comprised by the knowledge of someone, as how much surety he is given by gentleness, by humbleness, and by love.”⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Lat.: “If God is with us, who is against us?”

⁹⁰ Stăniloae, Priest Professor PhD Academician Dumitru, *The Romanian Philokalia*, volume I, Harisma Publishing House: Craiova, 1992, Mark the Ascetic, About the Ones Who Imagine that They Straighten Themselves from Deeds, in 226 Heads, Head no. 91.

Motto: “Quid est veritas?”

Sign 8 – Do you think that it will bring you peace?!...

“Father Mihai, please bless me to sit that exam for that management position! I do not want to show myself like a boss, but the other candidate, in case he is promoted, he will be my boss and he is going to make my life miserable; because he is a strange dude... I think he is not sane in his head, ne gets along with nobody, neither with himself!... he initially failed the psychological examination but then somebody intervene for him and he was accepted though...”

“My dear, you must endure with joy the sufferance given to you. Please do not accuse that man, do not despise him, but, a contrary, please pray for him!...”

“But... I cannot understand Father! If I let him do his ways, he is going to bring me to madness! I have been trained the whole my life that, when facing a danger, I must take all the necessary measures in order to mitigate that, and to use all the weapons I have for achieving the victory! So I was taught the whole this endless military service I have been accomplishing... And I think I will prevail, and can annihilate him, and I can destroy him! I have no other choice. I had never been the first to attack, but now I have no alternative. I fear that accepting his things, I will become as corrupt like he is...”

“See, my dear friend, now you judge the things with passion and in the same time you have decided to throw yourself, body and soul, in the easier war: in the worldly one. Now you want to do your will... It would be much better to let your will aside and to do the will of God.”

“But how could be the will of God that I to suffer?!...”

In *The Romanian Philokalia*, at Saint Maximos the Confessor, there are described four cases of apparent desertions which, in order to give us the good medicine, God shows us. But everything is towards our salvation!... He maybe tries to make you understand, by direct living it, what the daughters of the keeping of the commandments are like,

namely: the sapience, the restraint, the patience, and the hope... Are you sure the things you think about that man are real, or maybe you are to one who mistakes by perceiving him like that, because you actually are dominated by your vain glory?..."

"Father, how must I pray for him?"

"When you feel hatred or you have any other negative feeling for him, if he isn't there, you will imagine his face and tell him in your mind that you forgive him. And then, in both cases, either he is present or not, pray the Lord for him, by saying the following words: "Lord, help him not to suffer anything evil for me, for I am a sinner!"

"I will try to pray for him, Father... But, in the end, please give me the benediction to sit that exam! For I think the Lord will decide the winner and so I will know His will..."

"How are you, now? Are you at peace? Do not forget that there isn't anything harder to achieve than the peace is..."

"I think I am now... but after that individual is my boss, I surely won't be at peace!"

"The good Lord and His Holy Mother may help you! May the Lord's will be done!"

"Thank you, Father Mihai! The Lord may help us!"

"... but, do you think the whole this thing will be towards your peace?!..."

Motto: “Laborare est orare.”⁹¹

Octagon 7 – Shepherd

Travelling through the Dacians’ mountains brought him this time too, as for many times before, to a sheepfold. He loved watching the simple way the shepherds live their lives, shepherding the sheep in the free wilderness of the mountains, without worrying about anything. He also loved to stay around them and to listen to their measured, appeased words, and also to “listen” to their long periods of silence.

This time though, he came across that small and forgotten by the world sheepfold, where there was a shepherd almost not talking at all. That man didn’t welcome him, but neither told him to leave. He rather was tolerating him...

He, the Visitor, he loved watching especially that resting measure that shepherd put in all his gestures, in all his actions. The rhythms of the life they were self-evident, and the things, very few in number, each one had its precise role. That shepherd owned only the strictly necessary things, and nothing more. Also, each utensil was placed in a precise position, as the millennial tradition required it, and they never were left in disorder.

The succession of the hours, of the time generally, the day and night alternance, they were triggering each of them and all of them together, precise actions, which were being executed without any straining of the soul, rather naturally, as the breathing is.

The most beautiful were the morning hours when, once reaching the pastures, each time a different one, each time in a hidden place, and each time not touched by the human intervention or presence, the sheep entered the tall and fresh grass like some marine mammals in the waves of a green ocean, spreading themselves in searching for the most aromatic herbs they could get.

⁹¹ Lat.: “Working it means praying.”

The two men sit at a small distance from each other, keeping their silence, minding their own businesses, and keeping their silence... He, the Visitor, he often sunk himself in the wonder of the existence and got lost in there, without any more thoughts, without any action, without passions, and even dissolved in that Natural Revelation, in that Divine Supreme Person, but still keeping his own identity...

On each day, before sunset, the Shepherd set the flock in movement and before dark they reached the sheepfold which welcomed them and sheltered them against the nights' dangers.

Days, maybe weeks, passed, without a word being uttered. That was the most difficult thing to him, the Visitor, who permanently had the tendency to accompany his thought, his feelings, and his actions, with spoken explanations.

But then, the things entered the new "normality" on the track of the silence, especially because the Shepherd never answered his questions, and not even looked at him while addressed.

He, the Visitor, he still felt himself some sort of involvement from Shepherd's part, some kind of involvement... it was like that one asked for his participation... but to what?!...

But that morning he understood what he was asked for!... The Shepherd put on holiday garment - still simple, but neat - and kneeled down before that tiny icon and was praying silently. His eyes were shedding tears... and he was smiling...

He, the Visitor, he recalled those moments he had been praying together with Father Mihai inside their makeshift "monastic cell". And he kneeled down next to the Shepherd and started praying; on a given moment he detached himself from the immediate reality and he descended into his inner inside, where, due to his passions and sins, the grace had hidden there.

Their silent prayer spread a good fragrance of peace all over the surroundings.

Motto: “Mors non curat munera.”⁹²

Deluge 6 – Persecution

He didn't wish evil to that Boss he had! By no means! But it was so difficult to him to accept or to agree that one's opinions and actions! In the beginning, like he was educated, he showed his loyalty by presenting to that one the negative consequences and the dangers his initiatives implied, and the proposed him to renounce, or to adopt other solutions.

The most hard to endure was the lack of coherence that Boss manifested constantly; what he affirmed one day he changed the next day, and so on... It seemed that that Boss was uttering principles and rules according to the mood he had that day, or, even worse, it seemed that that one was constantly trying to make his subordinates insecure, and that was making him to feel great...

One of the colleagues showed him a project totally shredded by that Boss. That colleague wrote that project back, by copying the initial one, word by word. “You see that you can do it! Now is perfect!” was the Boss's reaction. In fact, the Boss only wanted to humiliate his subordinate, in order to nourish his ego, and not to solve the problem, if there was any!...

That Boss ended – of course, irrationally – to consider him as a threat. Of course the Boss had in his entourage a couple of Iago, who were fuelling his paranoia in order to benefit of privileged positions. There was one of them even providing the Boss with Gossips, out of pure pleasure... the more appalling such a Gossip was, the easier it was believed!...

So that, after one of the Boss's friends was to be given in the hands of his adversaries, so that the Boss called him and said him:

“I am going to remove you from your position!...”

The intention was to be appointed in his place, that “friend” the boss had.

⁹² Lat.: “Death doesn't care about your obligations.”

He didn't answer anything, for what could have been said?!... He didn't begged too, both because he was too proud to do it, and secondly because it would have been useless!... So he kept his silence and left the room.

Even if he was an expert in psychology, he couldn't do better. The Boss panicked, sent his provocateurs to find out what were his thoughts of revenge, how he decided to fight back... he knew their intentions and he didn't "betrayed" anything... for there was nothing to betray, for he accepted the will of God!

In the end, that removal from his position didn't take place. Maybe the Boss feared some imaginary consequences. But, in the same time, the Boss started hating him even more. After the Boss had saved that "protégée" he had, and even appointed him as his first deputy, both of them triggered a campaign against him, the Young Colonel, seeming decided to finish with him for good. They even caused false problems in order to have something to accuse him for. It seemed so clear that they wanted to destroy his professional career, and, in the world, they had all the necessary means, while him, devoted to the commandment: "You will love even your enemies!", he felt himself lacking any means of riposte.

He could file complain to the abuses inquiry commission, but, even if – it only rarely happened – he was given justice and their persecutors were punished, nobody followed to "forgive" him amongst the Bosses from any levels, because in that corrupt system almost all of them committed at least abuses, and the label it would have been attached to him it would have been made out of him the "black sheep" of the system. No matter how correct you had been, no matter how professional you had demonstrated you were, that label would have been destroyed your reputation forever!

"What I fear the most, it is not to become, myself, as they are... I accuse them for unfair prosecution and, in order to defend myself, even if I'm right, I will be forced to attack them, to harm their reputation, to destroy them. I didn't do anything against the one who were constantly plundering that house I had, I let everything in Lord's hands, and that man who were trying to harm me, he bought that house and he was the one

setting me free from that trap!... But I still suffer because I don't have enough faith to thoroughly pray for them!..."

His interlocutor only partially understood what he was saying him. That one looked at him like to an alien being: "Do you want to pray for them?!..."

He then felt for the first time that acute sensation of the precipice existing between the one who lives the deeds of the faith and the one who only theoretically know about faith. And he understood something more: "Knowledge makes you alone!"

Motto: “Infidelis recti magister est metus?”⁹³

Prodigal Son 5 – Fear

“Therefore, if we do not confess as we owe, even for our unwilling mistakes, we will find inside us, at the time of our exit from this world, an unclear fear. We, the ones who love the Lord, we must pray to be then outside any fear. This is because the one who will fear in those moments, he won’t freely pass over the chieftains of the hell. This is because he has, as those ones have too, in the fear of his soul, a confession of his sin.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Lat.: “The fear is an unsure guide in what concerns the justice.”

⁹⁴ Stăniloae, Priest Professor PhD Academician Dumitru, *The Romanian Philokalia*, volume I, Harisma Publishing House: Craiova, 1992, The Blessed Diadochus, Bishop of Photice, *Ascetic Word, About the Moral Life, about the Knowledge and the about Spiritual Right Judgment, Divided in 100 Heads*, Head no. 100.

Motto: “Nec scire fas est omnia.”⁹⁵

Octagon 8 – Into the Inner Inside

Those days on the mountain were especially beautiful! Though they were cold, the last moments of that long autumn colored the leaves in gold, and they looked like a scattered treasure amongst the predominant dark green fir trees, who were protecting that treasures against the harsh wind blows.

That squeaky rocking chair he was sitting on, on the porch of that cabin lost in that hidden place of the mountains, it once belonged to the logging workers. On that rocking chair he place and old and quite perished blanket he found inside that cabin. On top of that he placed his sleeping bag he was inside of.

He was looking towards the opposite slope of the mountain, resting his sight in the alternant regularity the fir tree tops were waving in, pushed by the wind blows.

He wondered what should mean to see the simple reasons of God from things and he only could understand that those things should be free as they had been created. Namely, the fir tree must be a fir tree, without having attached to it your lust for making a lot of money by hewing it down. Or, you can pick blackberries in order to quench your hunger, but harvesting them in order to make a lot of money, it was also wrong...

Was that life he lived, which seemed to be led in details – except the stupid things he had done – having a purpose?...

Since he was a child he felt inside himself a permanent attraction, a tendency to accomplish something important; he had some kind of a conscience of his predestination... But, to what?!...

That's why he practiced martial arts, enthusiastically... and then he practice yoga, in the same manner... and then he carved... and then he wrote books... and he read awfully much... All these things led him on roads which at one point

⁹⁵ Lat.: “You are not allowed to know everything.”

blocked him down here, on earth... All these runs took place horizontally... None of them offered him that liberation he was craving so much for, and for so long...

That strong mountain air, it was quite cold that day. So that he entered that shabby cabin thinking at lying down on that bunk bed, covered with hay.

During the last years of wandering through the mountains, where he usually spent few days on each vacation, he felt himself increasingly closer to something, but he understood nothing about that thing... it was like a unclear feeling, an accomplishment, a becoming... but a becoming of what? What could have been the nature of that transformation, of that self-accomplishment?!...

Roving the paths on increasingly higher mountain places, he had seen, from time to time, from distance, persons who seemed special, or at least unusual... when he was, rarely, granted a few minutes of staying or of dialogue with those persons, he had that feeling of not wanting to leave...

Had he passed by what he had been looking for, or had he passed by what he intuited that he wanted to find, and was it then, that thing he had been looking for, lost?! Or, had been that thing always ad hand, but, due to his blindness, he hadn't been capable to see it and he remained in a perpetual searching?...

He knew about this hurricane of the thought out of the writings of the Holy Fathers and he knew he must reject it like something evil. But, at that moment, his life was scattered like some brambles blown away by wind on a desert plain.

"Good evening! We are good people! Could we come in a rest for a while, before going further?"

He invited those three Persons inside. Their vestments were unusual, but he thought they surely had been some locals, because, otherwise, who would have dared to adventure walking on those narrow mountain paths in the night?

They wore grey astrakhan hats, which seemed to be brand new. As seemed to be new the waistcoats too... And there was also something to wonder about: the three Men wore moccasins... about which he thought not one was wearing anymore...

The three Persons entered, got off their hats and leaned their staffs with curved upper ends, against the corner from the right side of the entrance. Their calculated gestures had something ritually in them... Two of those people seemed to consider the third one as superior to them.

"Please, take seats around the table! Please excuse me but I only have a few things as food, but I offer you what I have, with the whole my heart. I didn't expected visitors..."

He brought at the table the food he had and placed it before the Three Ones, Who, at the sign made by the One Who seemed to be the chief, remained for a few moments with their heads down and with their hands clasped, and then they tasted a little food, rather not to refuse him...

"We thank you for you have obliged us, by offering us from your food! We want to offer you, in exchange for your kindness, a few answers, according to the measures of your questions, because we don't carry material things with us. If you want too..."

"Thank you, but what these questions could be about?!..."

"Ask us about the things you are looking for and you want to find out, but until now you have been passing by them, though, they actually were inside your heart."

That well balanced way of tone of the voice, the attitude of deep respect the other two listened to those words with, all of those gave him the sensation that there was no place for any doubt.

"I would want to know what and towards what am I always running for? What is my purpose?"

"The purpose each of us has, it is that discovering God in his heart and to become His servant to death.

But this great purpose is being fulfilled by accomplishing small works, done with patience, and with hope.

Saying a good word to somebody, giving something to eat to the needy, or giving him something to put on, forgiving somebody because he wronged you... all those seem to be small works but they are actually as many steps towards the great purpose.

We saw your soul. You are one of us. We are everywhere and no one can find us anywhere, without being him told and allowed. We are the Chose People of God.

The only thing you are required is to know about this and not to tell anybody. You are required to be a part of the Kingdom of God, and your existence and your works will enlarge His Kingdom. He will be living inside you, as he always was by His grace, since you have been Baptized.”

Those Three Persons stood up and, without saying anything else, they took their staffs. Before leaving the cabin, one of them placed on the table a little wooden bowl with ripen raspberries, which filled the entire room with such a good fragrance!

He stood there, astonished. He wanted to run after Those Three Persons, for he had so many things to ask them... He felt the urge also to follow them to go with them, and the fact they left him, he felt it like his parents, or his best friends, they deserted him...

But he couldn't move for a while... Then he rushed outside but, despite it was full moon, he saw nobody crossing that glade.

“Have I hallucinated?!...”

He hurried back inside the cabin. That bowl with raspberries was still there...

He ate a few berries and that extraordinary fragrance made him feel so happy... and so serene... He noticed a sensation like a veil had been removed from his soul. He had an extraordinary feeling of serenity...

He was so grateful! He felt himself fulfilled!

He received the supreme gift: the Peace.

Motto: “Petere licet.”⁹⁶

Deluge 7 – Fear

It was already night. It was so much silence, that, outside, the cold of the winter seemed brittle.

That quite dim bulb from the kitchen made that white paper of the book shining in a yellowish nuance...

Those exegeses of Maximos the Confessor, from *The Romanian Philokalia*, they seemed so difficult to understand – they required a more strenuous focusing than as usual...

He was forcing himself to understand those numerological considerations and he was so excited for the explanations give to different names.

He was tarrying upon the translation of the name “Jerusalem”, meaning: “the place from where one can see the peace”.

While meditating, that all-mastering quietude made the intensity of the contemplation to constantly grow up, making him also to feel an increasingly stronger detachment from the things surrounding him... And there occurred, suddenly, cruelly, unforgiving, merciless: the Fear.

It seemed that a razor sharp blade, as the one of a surgical knife, it cut his connections with the reality and it isolated him totally from the world. Although those surrounding things: the couch, the TV set, the table, the chairs, the cabinets, they didn't vanish and they were still there, that himself was still there, still having a body, in the whole universe there were only him and God!

He saw he had nothing to lean on, from the previous things he believed in: not the knowledge he had, not the family, not his acquaintances... nothing! Nobody!

That feeling must be the one the moribund have: that nobody can turn them back from the path they started to go on, nobody can help them, and no one can carry that burden in their place... that feeling was totally dominating him.

⁹⁶ Lat.: “You are allowed to ask.”

He experienced before panic attacks, but what he was feeling in that night it was ten times more intense. If he succeeded before to control himself, in the new situation he had the feeling that everything had been lost. The dread was flooding him in, suffocating him, almost killing him...

That silence having almost a material consistency and that ultimate loneliness: both of them threw him in a profound state of despair.

"I think I've just went crazy!..."

He gave himself that sentence with such certitude than no hope was left to him.

"I hope I won't start shouting out..."

Only the shame of awakening his family and of being seen in such a state, it stopped him from totally losing control upon him.

"Have I come too soon, and too close, to the things I don't deserve, because I am not working what I am given to know?!..."

He started praying like he never prayed before. That feeling that he had nobody to ask for help, because no one from the human being could help him, it made him even more abandoning himself to God.

Slowly, tormenting, he came into his senses, but not totally.

That fear, especially concerning the fact that he went crazy, it persisted for the next fortnight.

"Father, look what has happened to me... Should I stop reading?"

"The books exist in order to be read. But, each time you experience things which you cannot explain, please come and ask about them, ask for advice, because, as you know: "every good thing is done with blessing"!

Motto: “Mel nulle sine felle datur.”⁹⁷

Prodigal Son 6 – Keeping the Commandments

“As the fruit of the disobedience is the sin, so the fruit of the obedience is the virtue; and as to the disobedience it follows the transgression of the commandments and the separation from the One Who commanded, so to the obedience it follows the keeping of the commandments and the union with the One Who commanded. Consequently, the one who through obedience he kept a commandments and he worked justice, he preserved that undivided union with the One Who commanded; and the one who transgressed a commandment because of disobedience and he committed the sin, he detached from himself and from the union of love with the One Who commanded.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Lat.: “Nobody is given honey without gall.”

⁹⁸ STĂNILOAE, Priest Professor PhD Academician Dumitru. 2008. *The Romanian Philokalia*, volume II, Maximos the Confessor. *Ascetic Word, Heads about Love, Theological Heads, Questions, Bewilderments, and Answers, Interpretation to the Lord's Prayer*, Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary of the Romanian Orthodox Church: Bucharest, p. 214.

Motto: “Male vivet quis nescient mori.” ⁹⁹

Deluge 8 – Metanoia

He was at peace. He was convinced that if you fight you will succeed. His faith was until then a “theoretical” one. He accused himself for many times, by saying:

“I have been given my talents of the knowledge, but I am not able to multiply them by working, so that, because I am proving myself as being a worthless servant, my damnation will be much greater!”

But he didn’t feel in any way his deliverance from the claws of the alcohol, which seemed to be the only way he had to be delivered also from all the other passions he had...

“Because I have fallen so down, for such a long time, it means I cannot be saved, except by a miracle!

And that’s why, when I am saved, I will rejoice of my salvation with gratitude, with fear, and with tremble!”

⁹⁹ Lat.: “Anybody will live bad, who doesn’t know how to die.”

Motto: “Saepe maiori fortunae locum fecit.”¹⁰⁰

Prodigal Son 7 – Dispassion

“This is because of the one who is brought to this state - by the work of the grace of God -, he is off the world despite he still is within world.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Lat.: “Injustice can make room to a greater luck.”

¹⁰¹ Stăniloae, Priest Professor PhD Academician Dumitru, *The Romanian Philokalia*, volume I, Harisma Publishing House: Craiova, 1992, The Blessed Diadochus, Bishop of Photice, *Ascetic Word about the Moral Life, about the Knowledge and the about Spiritual Right Judgment*, Divided in 100 Heads, Head no. 40.

Motto: “Sacrificium intellectus.”¹⁰²

Prodigal Son 8 – Love

“34. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Lat.: “Understanding the sacrifice.”

¹⁰³ John 13: 34-35.

E. L. S. E.



THE SECOND DEGREE



“Ecce Homo”



Of the same author, in English language:

The Fight with Yourself. 2012. PublishAmerica: Baltimore, the United States of America.

Identity Sheets. 2013. PublishAmerica: Baltimore, the United States of America.

A Threefold Loneliness. 2014. Coauthors: Horia Ungureanu, Dragoş Ceahoreanu. PublishAmerica: Baltimore, the United States of America.

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